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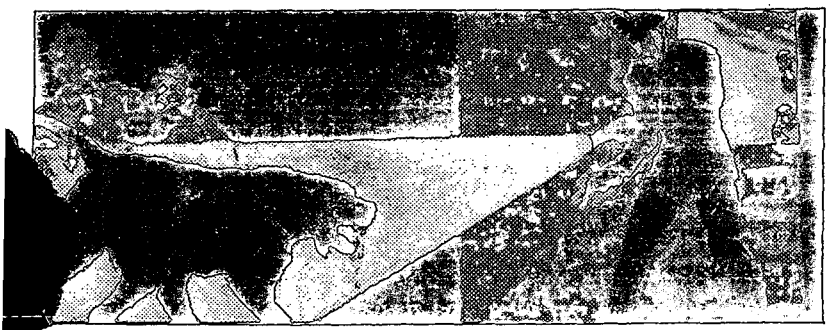

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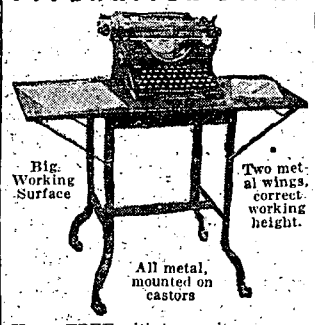


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COVER BY EDD CARTIER

Illustrations by: Cartier, Flessel, Kramer and R. Isip

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# OF THINGS BEYOND

NEXT issue brings a collaboration —L. Sprague de Camp, specialist in whacky logic and the exactly right use of the wrong word, and Fletcher Pratt, new to Unknown, but not, by any manner of means, new to writing. It seems Pratt makes a hobby of reading the Norse Edda in the original and de Camp was studying up on symbolic logic, and somehow the two studies got crossed. The result is "The Roaring Trumpet," which is what happened when a modern psychologist got his formulas a little mixed and landed among the Norse gods. He went prepared, of course, but his preparations didn't work. Science didn't work. Not in that world, it didn't. In the world of the Norse Edda, science hadn't been invented. But magic, now—

Also, of course, the next issue brings the conclusion of Jack Williamson's story of Theseus and the Minotaur, as the Greeks did *not* tell it. The short-story backing for these items looks rather better than usual, I think. Generally speaking, shorts in the fantasy field have more difficulties, for the author, than longer yarns. They have to build up a mood and tell a story in rather limited space. More difficult—but also more fun, when the author makes it tick.

Finally, may we again suggest that maybe some of your friends would like Unknown, if properly introduced? This book suffers a slight handicap; it is unique, and appeals to adult minds. Somehow adults don't look over newsstands very thoroughly, wherefore Unknown grows by word-of-friend advertising. Most thoroughly logical and sensible adults enjoy an occasional splurge of complete illogicality—wherefore, I feel, most would enjoy Unknown if given a chance to try it. Generally, the old-rags-and-bottles man makes a poor prospect, not having sufficient sense of the logic of things to enjoy the flavor of logic gone subtly wrong, so we'd appreciate it if you'd try some outlet for finished copies that might possibly be more useful.

As far as we can make out, there are two types of humanity from the Unknown viewpoint; those who wonder what anybody sees in that thing, and those who get a more-than-average amount of enjoyment out of it. We suspect that that has something to do with the reader's ability to enjoy logic that ain't so.

Personally, of course, I have a lot of fun with it. Apparently a good many thousands of other people already do, and, presumably, a good many thousands more might.

THE EDITOR.

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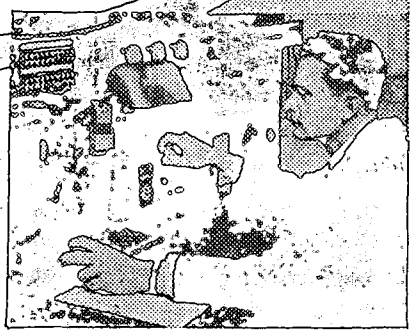

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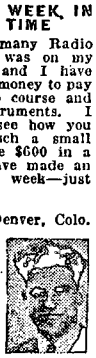

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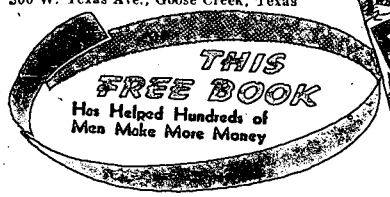

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# The Indigestible TRITON

by RENÉ LAFAYETTE

**When a human gets tangled up with a very angry Triton from King Neptune's Palace Guard — even a madhouse can't contain 'em.**

AUTHOR'S NOTE: A psychiatrist, in the pursuance of his profession, repeatedly runs upon case histories which are quite outside his ordinary catalogue of mental ills. All too often such strange incidents are passed over and vaguely headed "coincidence" or "delusion," for, indeed, a man who is continually dealing with unnatural circumstances becomes more or less immune to interest in them and so does not pursue the course as he possibly should. The fact that psychiatry has succeeded in healing but a small percentage of the known ills of mind rather indicates that the subject is not, as yet, ready for its place among the sciences for all its brave effort to so style itself.

Very definitely, the psychiatrist, as the physicist, is continually toe to toe with the black unknown which, quite likely, will

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never be satisfactorily explained. But, as a member of the profession, one is qualified to state that in his fever to get all things under simple headings, the psychiatrist turns a blind eye and a deaf ear toward anything which is not strictly and wholly to be grouped in ordinary headings.

The more a man learns, the more he knows that he has far more to learn, and the highest intelligence is the one which has come into the healthy realization that man's eye is a pocket flashlight striving to penetrate the dark side of the moon.

As an example of this, Unknown recently published "Death's Deputy," a story built around the actual findings on the subject of the accident prone. Since that time—as before—there have been several attempts to reach a possible cause for this strangely illusive case—for no one has ever begun to advance an explanation for the accident prone, and yet there are thousands of well-substantiated cases which confirm his actual ability to bring disaster to all those in contact with him. But the accident prone is only one unexplainable phenomenon amid a thousand such.

It is the pity of the "science" of psychiatry that insanity itself should have such a shaky definition. Insanity cannot be found and labeled at will, for we always arrive in that maze of logic surrounding the question, "What is normality?" Any man who does not think and act like the bulk of his fellows is, in some degree, "insane." Any man who sees either danger or value in an object not widely recognized as dangerous or valuable is then a target for the suspicion of his fellows. When mankind supposes that it recognizes danger to society from an individual so possessed, then that individual is apt to find himself in a softly padded room. One man becomes "elated" and ascends to the rule of a nation; another becomes "elated" and heads a powerful new religion; another still becomes "elated" and is swiftly put away. As surely as men fail to understand a fellow, that fellow will be labeled "insane." A "sane" man, therefore, would be one clever enough not to expose his unnatural or supernatural experiences to his fellows and who outwardly hides his findings and beliefs to concur with mass opinion.

It is to be deplored that, in this way, many evidences which might have value to the realm of knowledge are boxed in the psychiatrist's files, and as no one who is "sane" ever comes to a psychiatrist, all such case histories are "insane." And yet a man can go quite mad from experiencing the discovery of a sweeping fact hitherto unsuspected and, in going mad, leaves the fact itself under the cloud of "delusion" and filed under an index of "neurosis." How many discoveries and adventures have thus been lost to mankind there is no counting, for, as evidence of this, every pioneer of knowledge has been judged "insane" in the initial stages of his work. The original discoverers of steam, electricity, artillery and astronomy were, to their fellows, somewhat "cracked." But these men were vindicated by a repeat of the discovery.

In this story we have to deal with a species which was once thought to exist. An entire race of people, at one time, was in close communication with the denizens of the deep. But today only the superstitious mariner places belief in the realm of Neptune.

I must, of course, because of professional standing, write this tale dispassionately and reserve all my own opinion to myself. I cannot authenticate it beyond my own contact with some of its phases which I myself witnessed. I protest that I write it only because it is amusing.

Its hero, Bill Greyson, was for a long while indirectly under my care, but it was almost two years after it happened that he took it into his head to tell me the story from beginning to end. He treated it almost apologetically and kept an eye on me so that he could stop the moment I might begin to laugh at him instead of with him.

I can see him now, sitting in a chair leaned back against the wall, a pensive look upon his pleasant face, the sunlight from the window creating a pattern of bars across his white shirt. I can see him rise now and then without ceasing his story to look out across the sparkling white of the beach beyond the walls where his beloved Ginger was a tiny silhouette against the aching blue of the sea.

And so, without further comment, I give you the story as it was told to me, adding only such details as Bill himself could not have added. RENÉ LAFAYETTE.

## I.

HIS family was convinced he was crazy. And though he had worked hard to convince them at a time when such a supposition was necessary to his very existence—as he

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thought—he was now much less desirous of the state, for the danger had passed.

Tall and good-looking and loosely set together, Bill Greyson was a man who apparently had no slightest concern in the world. His grin was friendly and sometimes slightly apologetic as though he meant to say with his face that, well, he guessed he was kind of wild at times, but it wasn't really so. But if he was wild, there was plenty of excuse for it.

He had been born with a diamond-studded spoon in his mouth, as he always said, but diamonds are damned hard on the tongue. He had been spoiled until even he had gotten sick of himself and then, his family relapsing, he had been ordered about and his existence regulated until even easygoing Bill Greyson was in a state of violent revolt.

For they figured out that marriage was just about what he needed. And they had chosen a prim, practical, puritanical and parsimonious icicle of a girl as his future spouse. At first Bill had fought an out-and-out battle over it, but when a fellow's mother and father and sister and his aunt Agatha are all set on his doing one certain thing with the best possible grace, that fellow is wise if he knows he hasn't the chance of a cat aswim in the middle Atlantic.

Bill looked forward to a long line of calm evenings before a fireplace, reading a newspaper and wishing he could smoke his pipe, while Priscilla—his family's choice—knitted small things with precise *click-clicks*. And the other girl in the case would have to go and drown her sorrows or herself for lost love of Bill. The family would never have approved of Ginger in any case even though she was sweet and beautiful for, like Bill, she was a little mad at best.

At first Bill had tried to sell his family on Ginger. But he had bolstered his nerve with too many ryes and had cried out, what the hell, it didn't make any difference if Ginger didn't have a ponderous family for, ye gods, didn't he have enough family for both of them? Aunt Agatha had taken to bed for a week on the strength of that. Somehow, he hadn't been able to make them see his case.

Of course the family was short on understanding, but families almost always are. They thought Ginger, being too much like Bill—loving to dance and see sunrises—would be the final ruin of him, whereas prim Priscilla would have a beneficial effect. What they missed was the fact that Bill and Ginger would probably have been too happy to have any reason for Bill to drink. And they weren't deep enough to reason that Priscilla would probably turn Bill into the Face in the Barroom Mirror.

And so Ginger went to her hall bedroom and wept over the unkind fate which had born her into a working world, so denying her the one thing which was her life—Bill. And Priscilla looked pensively at her game and dreamed metallic dreams about what she would make out of him. And the thing was all settled and solved.

That is, it was all settled and solved until Bill found out that he had a few cunning tricks in an otherwise open nature. He himself hadn't suspected his possession of such guile, but then, nearly anyone that knew Priscilla would not have been surprised.

Bill was agreeable to everything. He was calm and possessed. But when the wedding rehearsal began, there was Bill with a Knight Templar hat upon his head and no pants, insisting that he was Christopher

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Columbus and that he was about to marry Queen Isabella. Everyone was a little startled. Especially so, for he soon began to eat the pages out of the prayer book and chuckle with content. He became rather violent when Priscilla objected to his eating her pearls, and so people sent for a doctor. The doctor looked grave and sent for an alienist. The alienist looked graver and remembered to himself that his school chum, Dr. Cotter, had just opened a sanitarium in Florida and needed business badly.

And that is how Bill Greyson came to us. And this is why the pronouncement of actual insanity upon him following the Triton incident came as such a terrible blow to him.

For Ginger—wistful, pretty little Ginger—had gotten a job in a near-by-town café and Bill had contrived to get her word that before long even his aunt Agatha would permit them to marry if it meant that he would again be sane. And so it would have been if, as Bill relates, the Triton accident had not happened.

I WAS NOT Bill's psychiatrist. At that time I was little older than Bill, striving earnestly to understand what made people depart from their rational states of mind. No, I was not in charge of the Bill Greyson case for that was altogether too important, socially and financially, to Dr. Cotter for it to be intrusted to another. It was my opinion that the foregoing version was wholly true. It appeared that he himself, had read a book on mental diseases and, unable to decide on one particular type, had mixed several, much to Cotter's confusion. Not, of course, that Cotter wanted to cure Bill.

That was the one hitch in Bill's plans—Cotter. For it was costing the Greyson family much money to keep Bill down at Balm Springs, in Florida's healing clime, and patients were few and the expenses of building the place had not been met. And a nice, complicated case of unclassified neurosis was just what Cotter needed to pay off the bricklayers. I know, for I made the error one day of suggesting that Bill Greyson appeared to be faking it, and Cotter wouldn't speak to me for a week.

Dr. Cotter was, of course, conscientious and truly concerned and doing his best to cure Bill of whatever Bill might have (see Code of Hippocrates). That the cure extended to Bill's money was none of my concern. For even I, at times, am reluctant to part with a patient. When a man breaks his leg, anyone can see when it has healed. But when a man goes off his base, not even a psychiatrist can tell when he is back upon it again.

Bill, very shortly, showed alarming signs of sanity. Of course, it was probable that this was merely a cunning dodge on the part of a maniac to throw his doctor off the scent, for Cotter well knew the lengths a man would go to keep from being cured.

When Bill had been there about two months, I saw one such conference. I was called in to witness that Bill's right knee showed no reflex. Dr. Cotter, rotund and impressive, tapped his pince-nez against his thumbnail and looked concerned. Bill, draped over a chair with the guilty limb dangling, stated that that knee's reflexes had never worked since the day he had broken it on a polo field. Bill was pretty earnest about it. He was getting worried. For a month he had carried on his act. For the next month he had slacked off. And now he was trying pretty desperately to make good his case. He had visions of poor little

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Ginger collecting restaurant checks for the remainder of her days.

I knew Cotter would hold out to the last ditch—or to the last bricklayer—and it wasn't my business to discourage such a valiant attempt to become solvent. Besides, I wasn't really sure myself that Bill was faking, for, after all, he hadn't been my patient.

"Look," said Bill, "if I hang around this bughouse another day listening to Napoleon write checks on the National Bank of New York, I really *will* slip a cog. You gotta let me do something!"

Cotter looked grave. "Bad symptom, restlessness." He again poked at the knee. "Serious, eh, René?"

I agreed that it was. For it is really rather odd for an injury to leave a knee without a reflex. (And whether Cotter had to pay bills or not with his fees from Bill has nothing to do with Bill's insanity; for all I know he really was and is insane—this story being strictly *his* version.)

"Serious, hell!" said Bill. "Look up my medical record. They sent it down with me. Give me something to do!" For such an easygoing fellow, he appeared to be upset.

Naturally he wasn't given anything to do. And, at noon, Bill was missing!

Knowing about Ginger, I got permission to hasten to the town, supposing I would find Bill with her. Certain it was that he could not get far, for guards were out everywhere and the highway was posted so that no autoist would thoughtlessly give him a lift, and the railway was informed so that all freights went out empty of bindlestiffs.

Unless Bill wanted to try to swim the Atlantic or feed himself to the 'gators in the swamps which abounded around Balm Springs, we would certainly have him, even if he hadn't sought out Ginger.

I FOUND HER sitting behind her wicket in the café, taking checks and money from the lunch-hour crowd. I hadn't seen her before, for I seldom got to town and never ate there. But, seeing her now, I instantly eschewed all thought of eating at the sanitarium again. Bill, obviously, had good taste.

Ginger was not more than five feet one, but she made the most of it, sitting very straight on her bookkeeper's chair as though she sat upon a throne. Her hair made a gold aura about her startlingly white face and her eyes were two bright emeralds as they turned aside the invitations with which she was constantly plied.

I eased up on the side of the cage.

She flicked a chilly glance at me. "Roll your dust, Romeo."

"No," I said, "you don't understand. I've got to see you for a moment—alone."

"*Heheh*, I'm laughing. A dollar eighty, sir."

"I'm Dr. Lafayette from the sanitarium. I've come about Bill Greyson."

The emeralds flashed with alarm. A few pieces of change slipped out of her fingers and rolled about the desk. "He's—all right?"

"He's missing."

She waved a waiter to her place and led me over to the wall, out of earshot of the crowd. "When?"

"About an hour ago. We figured he'd come to see you."

"He hasn't. You'll have to take that on faith. He— Look, doc, even if he does I'm not going to turn him over to you."

She had herself under control now. "Bill's as sane as we are and you know it. Maybe he was a little crazy at first, but if you'd seen that woman

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they were going to appoint his jailer, you wouldn't wonder. You can't keep him there the rest of his life."

"He may be sane and he may not. The question isn't for me to decide. But if he's known to have escaped from here he'll be picked up wherever he goes. He won't have any money—"

"I'm handy at collecting pay checks. It's Bill I want, not the Greyson bankroll. If he comes to me— Look, doc, you seem to be a pretty good sort. But your sanitarium would be pretty darned embarrassed if Bill Greyson turned up missing in the public prints."

"It's not mine. I only work there."

"Just the same, you can make old Cotter see the point. If Bill comes to me and I turn him back to you, will you promise to discharge him as cured in a couple weeks?"

"I can't bargain like that. I'm not sure he's sane."

"You better be sure," said Ginger, "or else you'll be minus a patient."

I went away and phoned Cotter. But Cotter wouldn't abandon hope, for it was entirely too simple to tip the local police to haunt the vicinity of the restaurant. Until we had really lost Bill we wouldn't have to make any bargains. Cotter was very concerned about the whole thing. I could envision him sitting there thumbing his account books and getting sicker by the minute.

We had, however, overestimated Bill Greyson's project.

Bill Greyson, unbeknownst to Cotter or any of the staff, practically owned the guards at Balm Springs. He had had a friend sell one of his roadsters and a couple of polo ponies and the cash had been sneaked in to him without family or doctors knowing. And he could have escaped sometime before if that had been his actual design. But it was not and he had not intended anyone to even know about his planned excursion. He was still confident that he would soon be pronounced sane upon his family's decision to let him marry Ginger. It was only that he was bored to weeping with the insides of the imposing buildings and walls. He knew if he spent another hour watching the bricklayers leisurely laying bricks in the unfinished left wing—

Being a sportsman, it particularly pained him to see all that oceanful of fish going to waste; day after day he had leaned on the sill of his window and stared through the bars at the rolling blue and the lucky fishermen putting out from the harbor down the beach to snare their fill of tarpon. Finally it got to the point where he felt that if he couldn't get a hook into a tarpon he'd take to cutting paper dolls in earnest. And so he had planned a six-hour vacation.

Only, the plans misfired.

He had sold one of the internes on the idea that he was sane and, for a sum, the interne promised to check Bill in for the entire afternoon; he had bribed his way through the back gate, for the Irish guard there had long since taken a fancy to him. And if Cotter hadn't decided to make an inspection before lunch, the thing would have come off without a ripple. As it was, unbeknownst to the renegade fisherman, he had not been gone fifteen minutes before he was missed.

Bill, however, knew nothing about the stir he had created. He proceeded through bypaths down to the bay and there found himself a twenty-five-foot launch and a man to run it for him. To the gear already aboard, Bill only added two cases of beer and ice to keep it cool.

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And so he went curving out across the blue like a schoolboy playing hooky, all set to nail himself a tarpon.

The twenty-five-footer had a wide, roomy cockpit all rigged for fishing. The forward section was housed over to make a miniature bridge, and forward of that were a couple of bunks. The engine and lockers were all under the cockpit deck itself but, unfortunately for Bill's verification, one of the lockers could be reached from the wheelhouse, and it was in that locker that he stored his beer. The mulatto that ran the boat wasn't slow to take advantage of the situation.

Bill assembled the gear, lying back in the stationary chair and reveling in his freedom. He was paying very little attention to the course until he noticed, at last, that the motion of the sport fisherman was decidedly frantic, for it had broached to and was creaming broadside to the waves as boats will when their helms are left unmanned. Bill went forward. There were about twenty empty beer bottles in the wheelhouse, all rolling first to starboard and then to port and trailing broken glass in their wakes. Down in the forepeak bunks lay the mulatto. He had evidently been on his way to the head when he had decided to just lie down for a moment or two until the dizziness passed.

But Bill wasn't going to allow this to spoil his holiday. He lashed the helm on a course and throttled down the engine and, with the land less than a haze on the western horizon, began to fish.

Now, anyone who has fished tarpon will know that one man alone stands but slight chance of landing one, for he needs help from the throttle and wheel. But Bill was so exuberant he didn't care a finger's snap about it. In a few minutes he got a strike and chortled to himself that his luck was holding admirably. It was a very strong strike and so, he reasoned, it must be a very big fish. But nobody eased the throttle and there he was buckled in his chair and there went the line with a high, shrill scream.

Bill braked down with all the strength he dared apply and still the line went out. The reel drum lessened its diameter to an alarming thinness and still there was no slackening.

What a brute of a fish *this* must be!

Out, out, out went the line. Down, down, down braked Bill. And then, with a rapidity which almost broke his arms from the reaction, whatever it was turned around from two thousand yards away and came streaking toward the boat. Naturally this required a throttle. But Bill did his best. He almost took the skin off his hands getting that line in. By some fortune—or misfortune—he succeeded in keeping the line stiff until the thing streaked off at another angle.

*Screeeeeeeee! Swish!* went the line and reel. The time had come for the tarpon, if it was a tarpon, to break surface. But no. It kept in the deep. Toward the boat, away from the boat, to port, starboard, fore and aft went the game. Bill was beginning to feel that he had at least a whale and mourned for the lost strength taken away by his inaction at Balm Springs.

He fought that "fish" until he was sure they had traveled halfway to France. The sweat poured from his straining torso. His shirt was in ribbons, his hat had gone overboard. His tendons stood out like superimposed bands. His throat was full of thirst and his heart protested like

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a two-horsepower engine trying to drive a liner through a storm. And still he fought that "fish."

SOMETHING had to give. For at the end of two hours the line itself was beginning to fray. Something did give. The "fish." Bill, breathing in sobs of exhaustion, reeled in. The thing felt like a waterlogged piece of wood now. His curiosity had mounted to high C, for "it" had never once broken surface or otherwise showed itself.

The reel drum got fatter and fatter. Bill was getting his breath back now, expecting to make a fight of it to gaff his quarry. But there was, evidently, no fight left.

He could see his tarp-o-reno plug come wriggling under the surface. For a moment he was frightened lest he'd lost his game. But, no, there was still weight to the line. It was just some trick of fish coloring, he thought, and so reeled up. He made an attempt to boost it over the side without resorting to the gaff and, after considerable effort, he got the plug out of the water.

He gaped.

There wasn't anything visible on it!

And yet it had weight!

He hauled up again and, abruptly, the plug soared over the rail and landed on deck. It writhed there, twisting this way and then abruptly pulling free. It was thrown violently straight at Bill!

"So!" howled a stricken voice. "*You* are the one!"

Bill blinked. There wasn't anything there in the cockpit with him except a spreading pool of water which stained the planks.

"A man!" raved the voice. "A &&** (??) ($&&$??) *man!!!* By the beard of Neptune, by the seaweed in the Queen's toes, by the teeth of the royal shark, I'll tear your flesh into cubes and feed you to sea slugs!" It gasped for breath and, from the slithery prints it left, moved nearer to Bill. Its rage began to tower. "&&? () ??*$&&!! and by the corpse of a dead marine, I'll stuff a wolf fish down your craw and let him eat you inside out! I'll make a cane out of your spine, a football out of your skull and feed your eyes to an electric eel! To be caught! And to be caught by a &&?? (??) *$&& *man!!!*"

Bill felt himself seized and dragged toward the rail. He planted his feet sturdily and wrestled with the invisible assailant. He was far from being a timid sort of fellow, was Bill. He had once ridden a last chukker with three broken ribs and, in the Maine woods, had wrapped a gun butt around the neck of a raging bear. But all his dangers before this had been something you could sink a punch into and this creature couldn't even be seen!

But Bill held onto his wits one way or another and yelped: "Who are you? What are you? I meant no harm—"

"*Hah!* By the whiskers of the imperial catfish, that's wonderful! You meant no harm! You meant no harm and yet you fished for *me!* Why, you—"

Bill was almost to the rail now and the sport fisherman had fallen off into a trough so that each lunge bade fair to heave both of them into the sea. But Bill threw himself to the deck and wrapped his legs around a chair base. "For the luvva Mike, quit it! I didn't come out here to fish for you. How the hell could I? I don't even know what you are!"

"Is this a gag?" roared the air above Bill. "Why, you human spawn of a lopsided landlubber! Can you lie there and try to make me believe

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that you don't even know who *I* am?"

"It's the truth!"

The tugging let up a little and the thing evidently assumed an attitude. "Man, there's no use to whine and beg and lie—"

"Really, I don't know!"

"Then," boasted the air, "I shall tell you. I am Trigon! I am *Trigon!* Trigon, son of Trigart, grandson of Triton himself! My mother, mere man, was Fairia, lady-in-waiting to Amphitrite herself. I'm no base-born courtier but a captain of the Royal Guards and in my veins flows the blood of Neptune himself! I am *Trigon!* Now, battered wreck of a squirming wretch on a garbage-plastered beach, tell me that you haven't heard of *me!*"

"Never," said Bill with honesty.

"*What?* Why . . . why, you'll be telling me that you won't admit that Neptunis Rex is emperor of the deep. I know what you are. You're a Titan man!"

"I'm just a human man," said Bill, "that tried to keep from going nuts by doing a little tarpon fishing. Now please. Go away."

"Me? Go away without killing you? How ridiculous you men are! You think that a creature without scale or barnacle can hook Trigon and not suffer for it?" Trigon evidently found the idea very funny, for he laughed. The prints moved to the rail and Bill felt himself released. For an instant his heart bounded with the hope that Trigon was about to depart. But not so. Trigon piped a blast that almost split Bill's eardrums.

An instant later, for all he could do about it, Bill was yanked to the rail. He thought that Trigon meant to pitch him in without further ceremony, and was even more alarmed when Trigon did not.

IN A MOMENT the water alongside the idling boat was carved by dorsal fins, a squadron of wakes to which more and more fins added themselves. In a matter of seconds the sea about the boat was almost solid with sharks.

"Who called?" rumbled a voice out of the deep.

"Trigon calls! Who answers?"

"Mordon. Mordon, master of Gulf Stream sharks."

"Ah!" said Trigon. "So! I have wanted to talk with you! Why, you moss-covered fake! What kind of a convoy did you give me? What kind of a convoy did you give Trigon, captain of the Royal Guards? Your weak, your lame, your castoff apologies! When I got into trouble just now, not one would ease the line! What kind of business is this when Trigon can be hauled out of the sea by a !!&& (??) &*&&!! *man!*"

"I gave you that convoy in secret. I jeopardized my own position to give you any at all. You, an outcast, wanted by half the police caves of the seas, dares to speak this way to Mordon?"

"Why, I'll tear out your guts and pack you with worms!" bellowed Trigon. "I'll saw you in half with a dull knife! Take back those words or I'll come down there and wash my face in your blood!"

"It's true," rumbled Mordon, but not so strongly as before. "I take a chance even by lingering near you. It is said everywhere that you sold out to the Titans—"

"You liar!"

"It is said. I did not say I, too, believed it. Tell me quickly what you want, that I can get it done."

"I called you to ask no favor. I called you to give you a meal! But the undertow take you before I'll feed you now. Get away, you slimy

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slug, and may you go aground on a shoal of porcupine fish!"

The water was churned about the boat and, in a flash, the sharks disappeared, leaving the smooth waves empty.

Bill began to breath again, but the next moment he stopped. Trigon had him by the throat and had lifted him up off the deck and was shaking him. He was hurled across the cockpit where he lit in a heap.

"Hades take you," snarled Trigon. "I'll have to finish you personally—even though it *is* beneath my dignity. I've been tricked. Tricked into admitting that I have been caught by a !&&?? (??) $&& *man!!* Not only am I outcast from the deep but I must be laughed at by every minnow in the sea! Prepare to die, man."

Bill's wits, up to this moment, had been nearly paralyzed. But he was getting used to seeing the empty air talk and he was in a better frame of mind to meet Trigon. Bill's stay at Balm Springs had taught him a little something about handling men, and handling men might be somewhat similar to handling Trigon.

"I'm all prepared," said Bill. Ringing in his mind, for some weird reason, was the story about Brer Rabbit not wanting to be thrown into the brier patch and so get his eyes scratched out. "Use a knife or your bare hands, Trigon, and do a good fast job of it. You can throttle me or tear me apart or cut me in half, but please, please, please don't bother me any more."

Trigon's tailprints halted halfway across the cockpit. "What did you say?"

"I said you could hang me or drown me, smother me or eat me, but please, please, please don't stay around me and bother me."

Trigon had very definitely stopped now. He was suspicious. The only men he had seen were those who had come floating down from the surface and these, when brought around, had never impressed him as being particularly bright or dangerous. But then this was the realm of air and this man was in his own element and—well, he experienced a feeling that he ought to be cautious.

BILL SENSED his advantage. In truth he was somewhat astonished at his own perspicacity, for he had never been known as a particularly brilliant student. But he had felt like Brer Rabbit held in the grip of a wolf and, having acted like Brer Rabbit, he was getting results. Probably, any moment now, the Trigon would dive into the sea and leave him strictly by himself.

"Say that again," said Trigon.

"Boil me in a stew pot, skin me alive and make a jacket of me, but for the love of the god that made you—*Hail Neptunis Rex*—don't give me nervous prostration."

"Maybe it's my English," said Trigon. "I never did study it very hard. What is this 'nervous prostration'?"

Bill felt better. Yes, sir, Trigon would be leaving him any moment now. "Well, you see, I'm in a difficult position. My family wanted me to marry a perfect horror of a girl and I wanted the sweetest lady I ever met and so I pretended I was crazy. They sent me down to Balm Springs to 'cure' me. And, of course, not having been crazy at all, I can be 'cured' very easily. But I've been hanging around that place for two months, and just today I was able to get out of it for a few hours to do some—loafing. I tell you, if I have to stay there much longer I *will* be crazy. Did you ever watch a bricklayer?"

"A what?"

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"A bricklayer. He's a fellow who builds walls and things out of bricks. Well, the first few bricks aren't so bad. But the next hundred aren't so good. And from then on—"

"Why not?"

Bill started through the mechanical motions. "They take a brick off the pile and then they put some mortar on the trowel. They put the mortar on the wall, pat it three times, lay the brick on the mortar, pat it three times, scrape off the mortar which was pushed out and reach for another brick. They take a brick off the pile and then they put some mortar on the trowel. The put the mortar on the wall, pat it three times, lay the brick on the mortar, pack it three times, scrape off the mortar which was pushed out and reach for another brick. They take a brick off the pile and then they put some mortar on the trowel. They put the mortar on the wall, pat it three times, lay the brick on the mortar, pack it three times, scrape off the mortar which was pushed out and reach for another brick. They take a brick off the pile and then they put some mortar—"

"*Stop it!*" cried Trigon.

"You see?" said Bill. "And when you've watched that happen a few hundred times, you *really* get violent about it. It begins to eat away on your nerves. And so I came out here today to try and get some relief. You see, if I really go crazy, then my goose—my halibut, I suppose you'd say—will be cooked."

"Cooked?"

"I'll be in a bad way. So that's why I say that you can do anything you want with me if you kill me, but please, please, please don't do anything to hurt my nerves. I'd be awfully upset if I thought you were in the world around me, ready to pounce on me at any moment and my nerves simply wouldn't stand it. So, come on. Let's get the thing over with."

"What's the hurry?" said Trigon.

"Why, if you keep holding off you really will wreck my nerves and then I'd never be able to marry Ginger or anything because they'd keep me in Balm Springs the rest of my life. So, hurry up."

"Now, wait a minute," said Trigon, suspiciously. "Who do you think you're pushing around. I'm Trigon, I tell you. Trigon, captain in the Royal Guards. Well—I was, anyway."

"I'm not hurrying you. You can take your time if you want. But don't wait too long."

"See here," said Trigon, suddenly exasperated, "you're nothing but a !!&&? (??) &&! *man!* Where do you get off telling me what to do and what not to do? If you think I'd kill you now you've got another thought coming. Why, you kelp-headed freak, you got to remember that you're talking to *Trigon!*"

BILL WAS PLEASED for he felt that he had won the engagement. Any moment now Trigon would threaten to haunt him the rest of his life and dive off into the sea, confident that the threat would ruin Bill completely. Now that he was this close to safety he felt an insane desire to laugh about it. In the first place, he had yet to set eyes on this thing which menaced him, and when a man cannot see a thing he is at first very nervous about it and then begins to ridicule its existence. So far he had treated the matter in the light of a lapse of his own mind. It was some kind of misplanted idea engendered by the company he had been keeping lately.

And then an awful thought came to him. Suppose he actually *had*



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gone crazy! Suppose this was something similar to a hophead's dream? And the shudder of this brought him around into the blinding realization that Trigon was talking and that a demigod of the sea was standing here dripping sea water upon the deck of the chugging sport fisherman while the coast of Florida lay hazily to the west. He thought of the superstitions of sailors. What strange tales they told even in this modern age about the cryptic depths of the sea! He remembered how warships saluted Neptunis Rex whenever they crossed the Line. Pages of his old Greek mythology went fluttering through his head. How earnestly an ancient and cultured people had believed in the rulers of the deep. And he thought upon an old sailor's tale about dolphins being the souls of drowned sailors, and how dolphins always followed each ship—And those sharks! They had come up on call and vanished on order!

"I'll do what I mean to do," continued Trigon. "You *men!* You dig up the sea with your steel keels and clamber down into our realms without permission and laugh at our existence and dispute our sovereignty and steal our rightful taxes—and yet you wonder why we take you and smash your ships and drown you."

"Your duty," said Bill, "is to kill me immediately."

"What's this? Now you tell me it's my duty. Don't you suppose I know my own duty? Even if I am thrown out because of that asinine border incident—and I'm telling you right now I was just a goatfish—I still don't have to be told me *duty!*"

"That doesn't alter cases," said Bill.

"Look," said Trigon. "Which is the officer here and which is the man. Section 32, Article B, Paragraph 1, Section A of the Poseidon Penal Code very clearly says: 'All nymphs, monsters, sharks, et cetera, all gods, demigods, harpies and officers of the guard, et cetera, will capture and drown on sight all sons of man who have no evidence of having made appropriate sacrifices and representations to Neptunis Rex within a twelvemonth preceding as being citizens under the rule of the thrice-accursed and so-called greater-god, Oceanus, the Titan."

"Then, you see?" said Bill. "You have got to go through with it and you don't dare carry out any private ideas about letting me live and driving me crazy."

"Hmmph," said Trigon, a little baffled. His tracks, which were not so wet now, trailed down the cockpit and came to rest as though he had seated himself in the fishing chair at the stern.

"On sight," said Bill, "you can't get around that."

"Be quiet," growled Trigon, a now rather upset Triton. "You men make me sick. You name your boats after our seas and wonder why we haul them under. You fail to ask permission to use our realm and so we smash your divers into their helmets. And still you have nerve to come out and skip about the waves as though you owned them. Why, not two months ago, Vestis, one of my favorite whales, was killed wantonly not a thousand miles from home. And now, by the decayed stumps of batfish's boots, you've got the gall to insist that I kill you. Well! We'll see. We'll see."

AT THIS STAGE Bill made the error of believing that the Triton was not overly bright and he began to take stock of the situation with a view of escaping it altogether. He felt a little proud of his mental feat—en-

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tirely too proud, for the credit all belonged to Uncle Remus, whose psychology was of the very finest. Bill gathered himself up and sat down on the coaming, feeling a definite expansion of chest. Had he been able to see the Triton he would not have been nearly so sure of himself.

"It's a terrible life," sighed Trigon presently. He seemed to be a creature of mood—at one moment blustering and the next complaining of his lot as though gathering energy for another bluster. "From what you said just now you think you know something of injustice. But that is where you are wrong. You are just a man and so you don't know very much about anything, not even aquatic politics. I have been swimming so hard and so long that my wits aren't working properly. I tell you, it's something of a shock to have your world turned inside out the way mine was. And what did I do to deserve it? What did I do? I had the Langar Post—that's usually pretty responsible, for the sea is deep there and anything can happen. And I got orders—verbal, I'll admit—to knock off the Titan patrol over the border and start something. So I did. And what happened? Titan wanted to declare war and the first Neptune knew there were about a hundred thousand combat troops lined up ready to cave us in. So Neptune got out of it by having me court-martialed. He *did* let me escape. At least, I think he did. I never even went before the court. Well! I'm the goatfish. And where am I going to go and what am I going to do? I could be invisible, but that won't work because it requires heavy concentration and sooner or later I'll have to sleep and then they'll get me."

"That's too bad," said Bill.

"You shut up, you !!&&?? (??) &&! *man!*" said Trigon with renewed rage at a man who dared to sympathize with him.

"But I meant—"

"I'm thinking!" roared Trigon. "By the fifteen corns on the royal polywog's tail, can't a demigod think if he wants?"

"Certainly," said Bill. "I didn't mean—"

"There! There, I've got it! So, you bilious, tailless snipe, you don't want me to kill you."

Bill, having thought to have gotten away with it, came up standing with shock.

"Well! Kill you I won't. You're scared that I might drive you crazy and keep you in Balm Springs the rest of your unnatural life. So you want to marry a girl named Ginger, do you? Well! By the horny back of a bombfish, we'll see! Open your mouth!"

"What?"

"Open it up and open it wide, or I'll break off your jaw and feed you to the seagulls!"

"What are you going to do?"

"Open!" And Trigon evidently meant what he said, for Bill felt his jaw almost torn from its hinges.

WHAT FOLLOWED made Bill feel as though he was being ripped into sections or blown up like an overinflated balloon. His mouth was stretched out of shape. The skin was scraped off his tongue. His neck was distended like that of an ostrich trying to swallow an orange. When he sought to shout he only got his lungs full of an odor much like the sulphur and rotting seaweed of a tide flat. He reeled with the pain and discomfort. He tried to shout a protest and then, startlingly, he did shout.

"Stop!" cried Bill.

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*Something unseen laid hold of him, shook him like a puppy, and abruptly forced his mouth wide. Bill gargled horribly, choked—*

He felt a squirming inside of him and the sensation was like that of two fat men trying to crowd into the same phone booth.

"Stop!" wailed Bill again, frightened, now that he had no idea whatever what was going on.

"I've stopped," said Trigon. "Ugh! This is a tight fit."

But the voice came out of Bill!

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It came out of his own throat, but not through his own vocal chords!

He twisted and turned and writhed.

"Quit," said Trigon. "It's bad enough now without you making an eel out of yourself!"

"What . . . what are you trying to do to me?" gasped Bill.

"Ruin you, of course," said Trigon.

"But how—"

"I am nothing but an idea, just as you are. And when you've studied simple military magic you'll know just what can be done with ideas. I am part of you."

"Yes . . . but—"

"I cannot risk my neck in the sea what with every patrol out looking for me. And, very clearly, I've got a good case of revenge against you. Very well. You're scared you'll look like you're crazy. Whether you like it or not, you'll see."

"But you can't do this—"

"Oh, can't I, though?" rumbled the Triton inside Bill. "I've always wanted to look over the shore anyhow. Let's go."

Bill was instantly compelled toward the wheelhouse. Valiantly he sought to refuse. But another seemed to have complete control of his limbs. His mind was entirely free to think as it would, but he felt as though another used his senses as well. His nerves were ruined already merely because of this voice which came booming out of him.

Very unwillingly he coursed into the wheelhouse and grasped the helm with his right hand while he shoved up the throttle with his left.

The sport fisherman leaped under the spur and curved around to race with the seas toward the smoky shoreline.

"Very good," rumbled the Triton.

"Good Heaven," whispered Bill.

## II.

Two hours later, Bill left the sport fisherman at its wharf and wandered down the road toward the town. He did not know that the whole countryside was beating the brush for him, but he did know that he had better not go back to Balm Springs proper until he had some assurance of a control over Trigon.

The stuffy feeling had passed. Evidently Trigon had managed to fit himself into Bill pretty well. And Trigon had been quiet for some little while, probably marveling at the aspect of the shore—which he had never approached until this day.

Bill caught himself shying at cars and starting violently at any unexpected sound; and it was very strange to him to know what these things were and, without feeling the least bit worried, still make physical signs of concern. It was as though a sudden gap had come into his head, severing his mental control of his muscles so that an idea did not necessarily react in muscular reaction, and muscular reaction did not necessarily result from an idea. Too, he noticed a sort of rolling gait which he had never had before, a gait which was a cross between hitching along on a scaly tail and walking on two feet.

Trigon was so taken up with the palms and the pavement and the cars that he had relinquished his will for a little while. And Bill, wanting a cigarette, found no opposition to having one and so extracted his case from his pocket and lit up.

At the first flare of the match he abruptly threw it several feet away.

"What's that?" roared Trigon.

"Fire," said Bill.

"What's fire?"

"Well . . . well, it's just fire, that's all."

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Bill found himself striking another match. He held it up close to his face and peered at it as though he had never seen one before.

"Humph. It's hot. Like the sun. What are you going to do with it?"

"Light a cigarette," said Bill.

"A what?"

"I'll show you." And Bill applied the match to the cigarette and pulled in.

Instantly he was racked by a spasm of coughing. And despite anything he could do, he could not stop it. He felt a perfect fool standing there coughing like mad, roaring in one voice and protesting against the activity in another.

"Throw it away!" wheezed the Triton. "Are you trying to murder me?"

Bill threw it away. "But it's just a cigarette. I smoke them all the time."

"I'll get you for this," snarled Trigon. "You wait! And if you try any more tricks—"

"Honest," said Bill, "it's a habit. I want a cigarette."

"A habit, is it? Why, you pop-eyed stepson of a porpoise, you not only try to poison me but you lie about it!"

"But I need a cigarette. My nerves—"

"Titan take your nerves! If it really is a habit, it's one you better break in a hurry!" And Bill found himself taking out the cigarettes and the matches. Unwillingly he threw them into the creek they were crossing. He sighed dolorously and continued on.

After a little Trigon said: "Where are we going?"

Bill hadn't thought about it consciously, but he knew in an instant where his steps were taking them. Instinctively he was turning to Ginger in his woe, certain that Ginger would understand perfectly. And with that realization came a warning shiver.

"Just up into the town," said Bill.

"You're lying. You had a definite place to go."

"Oh, no, I didn't," said Bill.

"Oh, yes, you did," said Trigon. "I can tell by the way your heart picked up that you lied."

"Huh?"

"That's it. Insult me. Insult my intelligence! Why, you split-scaled sea urchin, even a shark has a heart. Now you'll know better than to lie. We begin all over again— Where were you going?"

"To see somebody."

"Who?"

"Oh, just somebody."

"I'll bet it's that girl you talked about. Get a being in trouble and he immediately looks up his mate. Never fails."

"Oh, no!"

"Oh, yes. It's your heart. All right. We'll go and see her. Come to think about it, I used to have a pretty good eye for women."

"How do you know anything about women?"

"Why, women get drowned same as men. Come on, let's go!"

"*Wait!*"

"Wait and be blasted! If she's anything like you say she is, oh, my sainted nymphs!"

Bill tried very hard to drag back but he had no success, for Trigon was very interested in something definite now and wished to slake his curiosity about Ginger. He had never seen a woman in her own element and he felt that he wanted to very much. And so he even stopped shying at the automobiles and hastened onward.

The people they met on the fringes of the little town were not particu-

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larly interested in Bill. Nobody had seen him and so the fact that he was being sought was not compatible with the presence of him. For Bill was and is a good-looking lad and Northerners were fairly common about the place. The only thing which merited attention was the briskness of Bill's progress in a place where nobody ever walked faster than he could help.

Trigon was diverted for a moment by the sight of the town. The palms stretched down their fronds on either side of the street in an attempt to shade the people from the hot sunlight. The pink stucco of the buildings was rather dull and repugnant to one so used to luminescent walls of coral. He did not like the aspect of hound dogs sleeping in the shade and he wondered greatly at a flashing electric sign before the Bijou Theater. But he was determined to be sophisticated about it all and so soon got back to the project in hand.

The Palm Café was just ahead, its brilliantly striped awnings moving a little in the warm wind of late afternoon. Bill sought to pull up, but he met with no success. Any strength which he could summon was very little compared to that of the Triton. And so, lacking strength, he sought victory through a stratagem. If he could walk right on by, Trigon might be fooled. And so Bill tried to walk right on by.

There was no instantaneous protest, and so he thought he might succeed. And, so thinking, he glowed a trifle.

"Hold up," cried Trigon. "No &&!!? (??) &&! *man!* is going to pull anything like that on me. If she's anywhere she's in here. I can tell."

And there they stopped, Bill trying to keep from entering and Trigon forcing him through anyway. Two pedestrians stared at the curious sight of a man wrestling with himself and then edged away. Bill tried to grip the door but Trigon prevailed.

GINGER was sitting behind her wicket. All day she had started each time anyone had entered, but she had at last become convinced that Bill would not come to see her. As a matter of fact she knew very well that it would be a stupid thing for him to do, considering, and Bill was not a stupid person. And so when Bill actually did enter, she was wholly unprepared. All the careful schooling she had given herself vanished. All her vows to remain composed and so protect him were gulped in one instant of astonishment.

"Bill!"

He halted because the Triton also halted. He gave her a sick smile of apology. She came to him swiftly, very alarmed.

"Bill, you must get out of here. They're looking for you everywhere! People are all through the swamps."

The proprietor, being a practical man with an eye to any possible reward, had advised himself of Ginger's attachment to Bill and he had been waiting for this very demonstration. He slipped now out of the back door and sped away with his news.

"By all the fishes great and small!" rumbled the Triton in admiration. "Never have I seen such a woman!"

Ginger's flow of words was dammed. She stared at Bill. For the voice was not Bill's and yet it had come from his mouth. And Bill had never been anything but a white knight in his conversation with her.

"It's—well, it's just something I ate," said Bill.

She forgot it in the next instant. "You must go!" she urged. "Here. I've saved fifty dollars out of my

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pay. Go as far as it will take you and then write me so I can send you more. Take it!" And she pried open his hand and placed the money there.

"People looking for me?" said Bill. "Why?"

"Because you escaped. The asylum found out you were missing before you'd been gone an hour. Everybody is scared. The last time a lunatic escaped he killed a man."

"But I'm no lunatic," said Bill.

"Don't let him kid you, sweetheart. He's crazy as a herring."

Again Ginger blinked. And then she looked around to make certain it had not come from some other place than Bill. And Bill, knowing well that he could neither explain nor linger, tried to get away. But Trigon held him there, for Trigon was much taken with Ginger.

"What . . . what did you say, Bill?"

"This isn't Bill. This is Trigon. I'm no . . . no *man!* I'm a god. A demigod, anyway. And I'm a captain of the Royal Guards. And if you want to stay on the good side of me you better get it straight right away that I'm no . . . no *man!*"

"Bill," said Ginger in concern.

"I can't help it," said Bill. "You see—"

"Don't believe a word he tells you. He's an awful liar. And I wouldn't be surprised if he had half a dozen dames in every port. Now, look, my sparkling diamond—"

"*Shut up!*" cried Bill.

Instantly he was shaken in a circle, knocking over two tables and three chairs and breaking several glasses. Then he came up to Ginger again, growling: "I guess that'll teach him his place. Now look, beautiful. As soon as I do for this guy I'm going to come back and we'll get together. I've got a lot to talk over with you, such as giving you a wising on thinking a skipjack like this is good enough for you. You just wait. I've got coral palaces that you could lose this town in and I'd let fifty nymphs wait on you and even the Old Boy himself would send you presents. Just as soon as I fix up this bill—"

Ginger was reduced to tears. "Bill . . . Bill, what has happened to you? Why do you talk to me this way? You're . . . you're just joking, aren't you?"

"*Hah!* Joking! You wait. *You wait!*"

"Ginger!" cried Bill. "I'll explain. I'll explain everything. Something terrible has happened to me. Something I couldn't prevent. Believe in me, Ginger! Please!"

And Trigon began to laugh in high glee.

Ginger's sense appeared to be on the verge of departing. She reeled before this onslaught of alternate pleading and insult. And the laughter, coming from Bill's sober face, nearly finished her.

There was a buzz in the street, growing nearer. And, in a moment, half a dozen men, led by the sheriff, right-columned into the café.

BILL TRIED to escape but, for all the wide-openness of the rear door, he could not move. The six swiftly took him in hand and, surprisingly, Trigon offered no resistance whatever. Only Bill fought them and, somehow, Bill could not get properly into action before they had handcuffs and a strait jacket on him and then, of course, it was too late to do anything but rave and protest. Trigon, with other plans, was quite still.

The sheriff, whose mustache drooped down on either side like a hound dog's ears, was very solemn about it as though he went through a holy ritual.

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"Now, you boys just tote him up the street and we'll have him back where he belongs in jig time. Lead away there, George."

George, important with a shotgun over his ragged sleeve and his weak face gleaming at being singled out, led off to the sidewalk.

"Nyow," said the sheriff to Bill, "where was you when we was looking all over for you?"

"I was out in a boat," said Bill. "I didn't try to escape. All I did was to go fishing. Honest, sheriff, I'm telling you the truth. I was bored half to death and I didn't mean to cause any commotion. I'm no more crazy than you are—"

"Heah, heah, now. Don't go throwing around insults. Where was this heah boat you took?"

"Up the road. The mulatto that owns it got himself drunk on beer—"

"While he had a fisherman?" said the sheriff. "See heah now, Yankee, we don't give no tourists a deal like that."

"You come along and see," said Bill, stalling for time.

"You say you had some beer?" said the sheriff.

"That's right."

"Well, now, I reckon I don't see no harm in going along to look at that boat. Do you, boys?"

They didn't see any harm in it, either, and so Bill was marched back along the route he had taken into the town.

"You know, sheriff, I'm just as sane as you are."

"Nyow looka heah, Yankee, don't you forget who I am when you're a-handing such gab around. I'm the sheriff and I'm a-doing my job of work, so you better go catfooted on how you talk to me."

"But it's true," said Bill. "Look. I'm sane as can be. I didn't want to marry a girl and so I pretended I was insane, and now they won't let me out to marry the girl I really want to marry."

"Well, I reckon I wouldn't know nothing about that, young fellow. I'm the sheriff and I ain't supposed to let raving maniacs go sky-hooting around this here country no matter *how* sane they are."

Bill was baffled, and so he trudged through the dusk in silence, scared that Trigon might come into the picture any moment, but trying just the same to figure a way out. And poor Ginger! What would she be thinking after his scaring her half to death that way? Gee, had he cooked his goose with Ginger?

THE SEA murmured as it tossed up its glowing rows of white upon the sand; a few fishing boats, half seen in the twilight, slept at their moorings; the wharf reached out toward the flaming tropical clouds which stood like crimson castles along the horizon. It was, withal, a very peaceful scene. It even smelled lazy. But it didn't soothe Bill!

The sport fisherman was still where he had left it. But, by now, the mulatto had awakened and was stirring himself groggily in the cockpit, wondering if he had really been anywhere, after all.

The group came up to the edge of the dock, some six feet above the deck of the boat. The mulatto saw the glint of a star and immediately remembered that things went hard with a fellow when he'd stolen somebody's running lights. He looked wildly about for escape, but the next time his eyes raked over the group he saw Bill, saw the strait jacket and was assailed by new thoughts.

"You eveh see this here Yankee before?" said the sheriff.

"Me?" said the mulatto. "You talkin' to me, ain'tcha, sheriff?"

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"I'm talkin' to you."

"Well—yassuh, I seen him before. He come out and he rented me'n' my boat and we went fishing."

"Hm-m-m," said the sheriff.

"And even if he does say I drank all his beer, it's a lie," said the mulatto, feeling his ground grow firmer. "A whole case of it fell overboard."

"You still got another case?"

"Well—yes."

"Pass it up. It's evidence, you understand."

The mulatto reluctantly turned and pulled the remaining case from the locker and passed it to the dock. In a moment the sheriff and his men sampled it to make sure it really was beer and then, relaxing a trifle, confirmed their findings. They seemed to have forgotten all about Bill.

"You see," said Bill, "I wasn't lying. I went fishing and came back and I haven't made any trouble for anybody. And if you'll turn me loose I'll report back to Balm Springs and save you—"

"Nyow don't go too fast, young fellow," said the sheriff, pulling off a beer cap from his second bottle. "How do we know you wouldn't try to run away?"

"Why, they're going to turn me loose in a few days, anyhow. I'd be a fool to go chasing off some place with the law on my heels."

"By jig, I think he's got something there, George."

"He sounds all right to me," said George, between gurgles.

"I'll just go back to town with you and buy another round of beer," said Bill, "and then I'll walk over to Balm Springs. It's a pretty long walk and I wouldn't want any of you to miss your suppers."

"Well, now, young fellow, that's a mighty thoughtful thing to say. George, maybe Doc Cotter was wrong about this here Yankee."

"Mebbe so," said George, forlorn now that all the beer was gone.

"He sure don't look violent," said another of the group.

"No, I should say he don't," said the sheriff. "In my opinion, young fellow, you're a right nice young man even if you are a Yankee. I'll just take this here strait jacket offn you and we can go into town—"

"Why, you fuzz-faced, bilge-eyed walrus!" cried Bill. But it wasn't Bill's voice. "Take your hands off me before I make your bones into a basket!"

The sheriff leaped back. That roaring threat almost put a marcel into his mustache. He had never heard a captain of the Royal Guards at his parade ground before.

"Clear out of here, you seaweed-stuffed, fish-nibbled, barnacle-plated, pile-wormy, bug-backed bloaters! Get away from me or I'll rip you into bait!"

The men were hurriedly striving to get their guns from the places they had parked them and they were falling over their own feet to leave the dock clear around Bill.

"It's a lie!" shrieked Bill. "I didn't say that! I didn't say—"

"Slugs!" roared Trigon. "By the bat-faced mummy of Menorre, by the whistle-finned snakes of Clarry! I'll make sandwiches out of your tongues and shoes out of your feet and sell your ribs for toothpicks! Run before I take a notion to stretch you into eels!"

The paralyzed group beheld a sight which made their remotest ancestors quiver. With terrifying ease, Bill was seen to stretch his arms and inflate his chest and, lo, the strait jacket creaked and popped and slithered down to his feet. As though they'd been made of taffy he sprung the handcuffs and hurled them at the crowd.

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At the edge of the dock was a huge mooring bitt, weighing several hundred pounds, bolted securely to the planking. Bill was seen to reach over and yank it loose and then, carelessly, to crack it in half across his knee.

Holding half the bitt in one hand, he hurled the other half down into the sport fisherman. The weight barely missed the mulatto and drove straight through the cockpit deck, through the hull and into the water. The sport fisherman began to sink in a hurry. The mulatto screamed with terror and leaped for the dock.

Bill was seen to raise the other half of the bitt and gaze around for a target. One deputy strove to shoot him, but the scramble of the others made it impossible. The second half went soaring out toward an anchored boat. There was a rending crash and that craft began to sink.

"I'm the terror of the deep, the nightmare of a shark! I got the soul of a devilfish and the strength of a hurricane! I eat men for breakfast and whales for lunch! I'm the wreckinest, rowinest, back-stabbinest, head-chawinest bully boy that ever squashed a fat man for his lard! Get away from me, get away! I'm danger and I'm death. Them I don't murder I maim! And my lullaby is the scream of a woman bein' torn to bits. I'm hungry and I'm starved. And right this minute I craves *human flesh!*"

The dock was empty.

THE MULATTO was swimming so fast that he looked like a torpedo shot at the horizon.

Four guns were strewn upon the planking.

Four guns and two hats and half a set of false teeth.

There weren't any crackers around there.

The surf had blended with and swallowed up the thunder of running feet.

And a gale of laughter came typhooning out of Bill's chest. It did not soothe him to be mad enough to spit nitroglycerin and then to hear himself laughing!

"*Shut up!*" roared Bill. "You've done it now, you hoodoo! They'll come back with cannons and half the army and blow me into smithereens. You ignorant cousin of a potbellied shark—*damn it!* Now you've got *me* doing it!"

"Cannons?" said Trigon, quieting a little.

"Guns, then."

"Guns? Oh, you mean those long tubes I've seen around wrecks. Hades' shutters! I could bend them into circles with my little finger!"

Yeah. Yeah, sure. Sure you could, you half-witted son of a biscuit fish. But the trouble is that before you can get your hands on one, it'll kill us!"

"Huh?"

"There. You see how dumb you are! You don't know anything about fire or gunpowder or guns. Look." And he snatched up one of the weapons dropped by the routed troops and blazed away at the planking. The hole was very impressive.

"You mean—" said Trigon. "You mean they'll use those—on us?"

"Right. And if you want to stay alive you'd better let me take to my heels and you dive back into the sea where you belong."

"Humph," said Trigon. "So it's just a dodge to try and get rid of me, is it? Well, I'll show you." And Bill was treated to the experience of seeing his own hands bend the gun into a series of loops and splinters,

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after which it was cast from him.

Bill saw his error very plainly. This Triton was a very stubborn fellow who, once he had made up his mind, would carry out his plan despite the most excellent logic.

"What," said Bill, "are you going to try to do?"

"Far as I can see," said Trigon, "I don't have to do very much. These guys around here think you're crazy. And now they ought to be convinced. But I'm not taking any chances. Once I start a thing I see it through."

"But you're liable to get shot!"

"We'll see about that. I guess you think Trigon would let off somebody that did to him what you did. What you did, you did. What I'm going to do, I'm going to do. Besides, these two-tailed specimens amuse me. Come on. You know some way to get away from them. Let's see you travel."

It was a very welcome order and Bill, once more in his own control, began to make knots away from there.

TROOPS ROUTED are seldom able to take the field immediately afterward. But in this case the whole countryside was instantly an army, for the gasped tale of terrible strength had swept from the sea to the swamps and out again in a space of minutes and every cracker for miles around had gotten Betsy out of the moth balls and was aching for a nice, clean shot at Bill.

Up at the sanitarium Dr. Cotter received a shock which turned some thirty percent of his professionally long hair a permanent gray—or at least faded the dye off it.

Jilbo, a Negro who kept the lawns and the kitchen pantry properly cut down, came wabbling up the drive like a duck trying to take off. Jilbo seldom moved very fast unless he had some gossip to spread, and on this occasion—

"Doctah Cottah! Ayoh, Doctah Cottah!" And Jilbo went hurtling down a hall and slapped his bare feet furiously down to bank himself on a turn. He arrived in the office in a cloud of upset wastebaskets.

"Doctah Cottah! Dey done foun' ol' Mistah Greyson! Yassuh! Yasindeedysuh! Dey done foun'm and he's most splittin' hisself apart and tearin' up de groun'."

Cotter came out of his swivel chair with a gasp and creak. "What's this? Where is he? Frank, Frank, get out the car!" He looked wildly about for me, which was strange, because I was sitting right alongside his desk.

"He's stark mad, suh!" said Jilbo. "He kilt six and maimed seben and he done gyine to rip down de town like it was hurricame time! Yasindeedysuh!"

"René!" cried Cotter. "Get a strait jacket! Get the wagon!" He whirled on Jilbo. "As bad as that?"

"Yassuh. Yassuh, and wuss. De sheriff he took'm in de café and he runnum up de dock for to get a drink and ol' Greyson, suh, he just bust right outn dat strait jacket and he pick up a mooring bitt and he bust her plumb in two and he sink two boats and de last dey see obum, he shoutin' he gwine eat up de whole town. An' den everbody and all de boys dey gettum all de guns and dey gwine to perforate dat ol' Greyson—"

"What?" cried Cotter, leaping up in horror. "You mean they'll kill him?"

"Yassuh. Yasindeedysuh. You ain' never seen no bunch of guns dat was so anxious to go *blam!*"

Cotter shrieked: "I'm ruined!"

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And into the air he threw a snowstorm of construction bills. "Oh, oh, oh, I'm *ruined!* He almost collapsed. "My bills! My bills! And my reputation! René, I'm a ruined man. A ruined man!"

I loaded him into the car which Frank brought around and then whistled up the wagon and the guards, and we were just about to start when a roadster came up with scorching wheels and screamed to a halt.

It was Ginger!

Her red hair was flaming. Her green eyes sprayed fire. Her face was a white blend of rage and terror.

"Doctor!" she shouted at me. "Doctor, they're out to kill him!"

"Follow us!" I yelled, and stamped on the throttle.

With the wagon siren wide open we went howling into town, and the first thing we saw was the sheriff, his mustaches standing on end and his arms going like windmills as he scooped up recruits. I skidded to a stop beside him, but he was so distrait that I had to whirl him around forcibly to get his attention.

"You just leave this heah fuss to me!" he yelped. "We got to get him and get him while there's still a population in this heah county!"

"You can't shoot him!" cried Cotter.

"Shoot him and I'll scratch out your eyes!" cried Ginger.

"He's a dangerous lunatic!" cried the sheriff. "He sunk four boats and he chawed up fifty men and we damn near didn't get away with our lives."

"Shoot him and I'll have your badge!" cried Cotter.

"Blast you!" cried the sheriff. "If I don't get him right quick, there won't be no county to have no sheriff. You let him get away and, by zowie, you better keep quiet. Who the dinkety-sizzle is the sheriff around here?"

"He's not dangerous," said Cotter.

"Neither is a bull with the hives! Come on, men. Hold your weapons ready and shoot to kill!"

The crowd went surging up the street with shouts calculated to gird their courage. Poor Ginger was having a bad time trying not to cry and Cotter, I think, was near fainting.

"We've got to find Bill first," I said. "Maybe he *has* done something pretty wild."

"I s-s-saw him," said Ginger. "He . . . he talked like two people and he swore and fought himself. But there's something terribly wrong about it! Bill would never do a thing like that!"

"Ah!" cried Cotter. "A split personality. René!" For, even in this bitter moment, he could not fail to rub it in on a professional point. "René, I was right. He's a schizoid. I suspected it all along."

"No, no, no!" said Ginger. "He's Bill and I love him and if they hurt him— Please, can't we *do* something?"

I scooped up an urchin all wide-eyed in a doorway. "Which way did the lunatic go?"

"Pears like he was a-headin' fo' Moccasin Swamp," said the child. "Is it a fac' he done bit a whole boat smack in half?"

I dropped the youngster into the back seat. "You tell us which way to go to get to Moccasin Swamp before that crowd up there and I'll give you ten bucks."

"Huh?"

"I'll give you ten dollars' worth of brand new dimes."

"Gee! Gee, mister!"

"Now, which way?"

"You turn on this road here and then you go about a mile and then

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we walk. Gee, mister. Ten dollars' worth of brand new dimes?"

The rescue caravan swung violently in the indicated direction and the palms went by like a board fence. The youngster was so excited with the ride, the dimes and the chase that he almost forgot to tell us when to stop. We pulled up and leaped out.

"Course," said the child, "it's kinda muddy crossin' th' swamp this way. It's closer to the middle but nobody never seems to want to use this trail. Maybe because a couple fellers was drownded las' year. Course I reckon the snakes got 'em and maybe that's why they was drownded—"

From far off there came a rumble of sound and then the banging of guns. Ginger cupped her hands and shouted: "Bill!" Nothing answered her but a bull 'gator and the renewed banging of the guns. Ginger didn't wait to see if the rest of us followed. High-heeled slippers and all, she shoved through the tangle on the edge of the road and began to fight her way toward the commotion. Cotter was almost weeping.

"I'm ruined! I'm ruined! How, how, how shall I ever pay those bills?"

I floundered after Ginger and Frank, and the guards followed me. The guns had started going once more and my hopes of finding Bill alive were very, very slim.

IN THE MEANWHILE Bill had made the depths of the morass. As Trigon was perfectly willing to evade pursuit for a little while, Bill was, you might say, of one mind and action. The muck was up to his hips in places and the water was often abruptly without bottom, and cypress and tamarack shot out their roots to trip him. Moccasins slid off decayed logs and sailed hopefully on the brownish pools, and somewhere a bull 'gator gave warning to one and all that he wasn't to be disturbed.

Bill, personally, was appalled by the refuge he had taken and before he had gone half a mile he wanted very much to slow down and hole up. However, Trigon did not think they had gone far enough. Bill slacked up, breathing hard, and sank down on a log to wipe the muck from his face.

"Come on," said Trigon.

"If you want to go on," said Bill, "you better swim it alone. If we go any deeper, we'll *never* see the light of day again."

"We'll cross this swamp and have the laugh on them," persisted Trigon.

"You see those snakes?" said Bill. "Well, if you want to go on stirring them up it's all right with me, but you'll have to do it alone."

"Snakes. What do I care about snakes? They'd bite you before they could touch me anyhow. Besides, if you think these snakes are something you ought to see a coral snake. Now, *there* is a snake!"

"Go on and jump into the jaws of these 'gators if you want," said Bill, "but I've quit."

"'Gators?" said Trigon. "Whatever *they* are. You ought to run into a Scylla."

"A what?"

"It's a six-headed monster with serpents and barking dogs for legs. Now, *that* is something to meet. I'll bet you haven't got anything that'll even approach it on land here."

"Thank Heaven, no!"

"Well, if I'm not scared of a Scylla, then why should you be scared of a 'gator? Come on. I'm not through with you yet."

Bill still sought to remain where he was, and he was angered when

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he found himself getting up and plunging onward. Sullenly he resisted as much as he could and so slowed Trigon ever so little.

Shortly they came to a clearing and beheld a house as sad and drooping as the moss-draped trees. Trigon let Bill drop to a walk and they approached the structure. It was built out of shakes and kerosene cans hammered flat; several fish poles were leaning against the eaves. But of the owner there was no sign.

"Here's where we stop," said Trigon.

"No!" cried Bill, stopping just the same. "They know of this place and it's the very spot they'll approach! I'll be caught!"

"Good," said Trigon.

Bill vainly sought to prevent their entrance when he found that the door was locked. But when he leaned against the door it went inward with a crash. Bill was halted in the gloom of the room. Despite himself he raised his head and sniffed in appreciative fashion. The smell, to Bill, was revolting, being made up of partly decayed bait and old scales and rancid oil and human sweat, but Trigon chuckled.

Shouting came from the distance and then the hollow baying of dogs.

"They're coming!" said Bill. "Let's get out of here!"

"Why? I like this place."

"But they've got guns and they're excited and they may shoot on sight!"

"And I thought the sea was a dangerous place," said Trigon. Thereupon he made Bill go fumbling about the room, lifting this and that. Bill had no idea what Trigon was looking for. He could spare no attention from the sounds of the quickly closing pursuit.

"Humph," said Trigon at last. "He might at least have left something to eat. I'm starved."

The bloodhounds were so close now that their various individualities of baying could plainly be distinguished. Bill made another unsuccessful attempt to get out of that door and get lost.

Human cries were redoubling when it became apparent that the quarry might have holed up in the swamp shack ahead. Bill caught Trigon off guard and managed to close the door and bar it. Trigon, too, was now interested in the posse and so they went to the window, and, wiping away the inch thick soot, peered out.

Four bloodhounds, all caked with muck, burst out of the swamp and charged, noses down, toward the door of the shack. They bumped into it and then reared back and began to scream their exultation.

Bill shuddered and a chortle of amusement came out of his lips. The posse thundered into sight and then, seeing that the hounds had something holed up, immediately withdrew to safe cover.

A reedy voice to be recognized as the sheriff's came from a bush. "You there! Come out with your paws a-wavin' or we'll blast that shack to smithereens!"

"Go polish your scales!" roared Trigon, giving Bill the shivers. "Whittle yourselves a toothpick! The only way you'll get me out of here is to come a-shootin'!"

"Oh, stop it!" moaned Bill. "They are liable to set this place on fire!"

"Huh?"

"Fire! It's hot! It'll roast us!"

"It's a lie," said Trigon. "You're just making it up." And he raised his voice to a taunting pitch. "Come on, you jelly-bellied bums. Try and take me alive!"

The answer to that sally was a

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volley of flame and lead. The old shack shook under the impact.

"I'm mad and I'm wild. I'm tough and I'm bad. Come on, you double-finned offal eaters! Take me alive if you can!"

And Trigon got his answer with another broadside from the brush.

"You frill-pantied ladyfish!" bellowed Trigon. "You dud-skulled fops! You thunder-footed, yap-brained, splash-mugged stenches! Come out here! Come out in the open and take me! Come out and *fight!*"

"Please, please, please," begged Bill. "They won't even leave a grease spot! They're begging for a chance to kill me now! Don't make it any worse!"

"I'll twist off your heads and bite out your hearts! I'll make fish spears out of your collarbones and marbles out of your eyes! I'll grind you up and butter your ancestors! Come on, you pink-livered minnows, come on and fight!"

And just when he wanted to do it

*With a feeling of foreboding, Bill felt Trigon within him swelling up. Abruptly the straps and buckles of the strait jacket began to pop—*

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the least, Bill picked up the rusty cookstove and heaved it through the wall. Instantly there was a cessation of fire.

"Yellow-spined herring!" yelped Trigon. "Run away! Run to your mamma and let her blow your noses! Run away! I'm a tidal wave and an earthquake and where I spit there's calamity. I'm so bad I can't sleep with myself and so strong I break the backs of whales! Run away! Get lost! Run away!"

BILL KNEW they were gathering for a charge. And he knew, too, that

there were at least two hundred men scattered through the brush bordering the clearing. He had visions of himself being scattered over a half acre of ground and his fragments too heavy with buckshot to be buried without a derrick.

There came a cry from the swamp in the moment of silence which followed: "Bill!"

It was Ginger!

But the charge could not be stopped now. A wave of armed men burst on signal into the open and raced toward the shack. And Bill was appalled to find himself dashing out into daylight to meet them.

The wave halted and guns were whipped up. There was no command for Bill to surrender. They were going to shoot him out of hand. Ringed by the black muzzles, Bill felt as if he were going to faint.

And then a startling thing happened. The guns all lifted straight up and fired in unison at the sky!

There was a rattle of amazed curses and again the guns bracketed the clouds.

And Trigon laughed until Bill thought he couldn't stand up from the very thunder of it.

Ginger sped toward him, amazed at the roaring mirth but, at any cost, bent on trying to save him.

And, suddenly, Bill stopped laughing. Or, rather, Trigon stopped. It was as if Trigon had vanished, though Bill knew that the Triton was still within him. And then he understood. He understood and could have wept. For Trigon had herded him into this position and then had deserted him so far as help was concerned. And there would be no question whatever now of Bill's insanity.

Ginger stepped in front of Bill so they could not shoot him. "Give yourself up," she begged. "Please, Bill. They'll kill you."

There wasn't much he could do about it.

"I surrender," said Bill dejectedly.

And before him stretched the vista of years in a padded cell.

The crowd was triumphant and went around in little groups bragging to other little groups about the part each one had played in the capture. I had taken charge of Bill and the guards had him wrapped up in a strait jacket with some rope to aid. We began our march back to Balm Springs, the mob tagging along, hopeful for more trouble.

And we did not get Bill back to Balm Springs without incident.



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We paused in the town and sent somebody after our cars and Dr. Cotter. Bill was very docile. He was trying to manage an apologetic smile and trying to keep from looking Ginger in the eye, and he appeared to be very unhappy about the whole thing. He didn't try to offer any kind of explanation; he was too embarrassed by the gawping townspeople who had sallied out to gaze upon him. We were convinced that we weren't going to have any further trouble with Bill. He was too thoroughly cowed.

When the cars came, they brought a very jubilant Cotter. The head of Balm Springs once more saw some faith in the future and a long list of paid bills in his ledger, and he beamed in fatherly fashion upon Bill. Bill shuddered.

"A schizoid," said Cotter. "I knew he was a schizoid. Ah, it will take years to cure this thing. Years and years."

"I'm not crazy!" burst out Bill. "It's . . . it's a mistake. I can explain the whole thing—"

And just then he flexed his arms and broke through the strait jacket like it was so much straw. Guns instantly made their appearance anew.

But Bill didn't do anything violent. We had been standing very close to a fish stall and he merely reached out and grabbed up a small yellowtail and began to gnaw upon it. There was disgust on his face and pleasure in the guttural sounds he made.

Ginger began to cry. Cotter beamed happily. We loaded Bill and his yellow-tail into the wagon and whisked him back to Balm Springs.

He had finished the fish before we got there, carefully cleaning each bone before he tossed it out.

"I can explain," he said miserably. "I—"

"Sure," said Cotter. "Sure, you can explain. Well, here we are, Bill. Let's go in and see if there are any more nice fish waiting in a special room we've prepared for you."

Bill got out and, ringed by guards, was marched through the gate.

"I'm sane," said Bill. "I tell you, there's an explanation for it! I tell you, it's not right to keep me here!"

And, so saying, he again broke out. On either side of the main steps stands a slim lamp-post, and Bill, with apparent eagerness, seized upon the left-hand one and promptly completed the feat of tying a knot in it. And all he seemed to suffer for it was a pair of slightly bruised hands.

The guards leaped for him, expecting battle. But they were quite astonished at the ease with which Bill again gave himself up.

"But I'm just as sane as you are!" cried Bill. "Honest, I am! There's an explanation—"

"Of course, of course," said Cotter, eying the twisted post with satisfaction. "We know you're sane. Now come along and we'll find that nice basket of fish."

Ginger, left outside, stood weeping and alone.

## III.

During the next four days Dr. Cotter was so disgustingly cheerful that, had the roof fallen in on him, he still would have grinned. He could be seen about the place admiring the fancy arches and gleaming wards, rubbing his hands together and giving all his blessing. He even stopped occasionally to talk to his foes the bricklayers, who were now completing the right wing. Cotter was anxious to stand well with them, for now he was going to have an addition to the left wing. He signed contracts and hummed and slapped

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internes on the back and chuckled over account books, and was generally in high glee as he waited for Bill's family to come down.

They had been wired immediately upon Bill's safe conduct into his padded cell and they were expected almost any time. In the late afternoon of the fourth day, a car sneered to a halt on the drive and there they were.

Bill's elder brother made the inquiries. He was very successful on the Street and so had to have everything done in the most efficient way possible. He reeked so with money that Cotter danced about and perspired and chuckled and bowed until he would have worn himself out had he not been so delighted.

Bill's mother sported a lorgnette and the second I saw her I wondered not at all that Bill was probably hopelessly mad. And my theories of heredity went tumbling. For she must have been at least No. 4 of the Four Hundred and, when her eyes had swept around a room, one instinctively followed their course and was surprised to find no icicles on anything.

Bill's Aunt Agatha was a worried sort, very small and restless, always a trifle suspicious that there might be mice under a chair and always certain that she had left her pocketbook at home and that she was coming down with smallpox at any moment.

Cotter pranced into his office and offered them chairs. But Bill's elder brother was there for no idle chitchat. "Where is William?" he said severely.

"Oh, dear, yes, poor boy," said Aunt Agatha. "I knew he would never come to a good end. It's a wonder to me his father wasn't mad long ago. Maybe it runs in the family." And she fixed her gaze upon Bill's elder brother.

Cotter was anxious to please. He trotted off down the hall, leading the way and opening doors for them and chattering about how honored and delighted he was. I managed to duck down a side passage and so arrived at Bill's cell before they did.

Bill was sprawled out on his bed, staring hopelessly at a spot of light which came through the small, barred window. He did not even look in my direction when I opened the door grate.

"Bill," I said, "your family is on its way down."

"O-oh!" groaned Bill. He gathered himself up and tried to smooth his hair. There was a wild glaze in his eye.

"Is dad with them?"

"No. Just your brother and your mother and your aunt Agatha."

"O-o-o-oh!" said Bill. And then, in a quite different voice: "Heh-heh!"

COTTER danced into view with the funereal procession behind him and Bill appeared like a man who is being lifted gently upon a torture rack.

"Here he is," said Cotter, pointing to Case 21. "Bill, try to behave yourself. Your family wishes to speak with you." And to the family: "Don't be alarmed if he begins to howl and curse. These bars are quite strong."

The three stood before the cell, heads together so that they could all see through the door grate.

"Poor boy," said Aunt Agatha. "Just what I expected."

"*Tch-tch,*" said Bill's elder brother.

"William," said his mother in a frosty voice, "don't you think you have disgraced your family quite enough with this nonsense? I can scarcely hold up my head in any

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home on Park Avenue for fear somebody will discover you are in a madhouse."

"Sanitarium," corrected Cotter.

"Madhouse," snapped Bill's mother.

"Madhouse," said Cotter.

"What on earth is wrong with you, you poor boy?" said Aunt Agatha. "Doctor," she said to me, "when he was very little he used to have tantrums. I'm not at all surprised. Does he throw things and scream?"

"Well—" I began cautiously.

"Indeed he does," said Cotter. "But he is on his good behavior now, aren't you, Bill?"

"I'm hungry!" rumbled Bill.

"Now, now," said Cotter placatingly.

"Don't pay any attention to that," begged Bill. "I can't help—"

"I'm *hungry!*" snarled Bill.

"Hush, now," said Dr. Cotter.

"I demand fresh fish!" cried Bill. "I demand fish wild and wiggling. I gotta set my teeth in *fish!*"

"Really," said Aunt Agatha, "I can't understand it. He never did like fish when he was a little boy. He said the bones got in his throat. But his father liked fish. He always wanted it cooked, though—"

"Shut up, you prune-faced hussy!" roared Bill.

"Now, now," said Bill's elder brother. "You mustn't talk that way to your aunt Agatha, William. Even if you are insane."

"And *you* shut up!" thundered Bill.

"William!" said his mother sharply, "don't you dare pick a fight with Gregory."

"If he was a fish, I'd eat him!" snarled Bill.

"Honest," said Bill, "I can't—"

"He *is* a fish!" roared Bill. "He's a fish and I'm hungry!" And he lunged against the door so hard that the building shook. The three at the grate went hurtling back in dismay.

"I'm hungry and I'm starved! I want him! I'll eat him chunk by chunk and feed his bones to the wolf fish! I'll cut him up in cubes and pound him until he's tender. *Fish! Fish! Fish!*"

"Oh, dear," wept Aunt Agatha. "To think he'd want to eat poor Gregory."

"Shut up, you bandy-legged old maid!" howled Bill. "Shut up or I'll turn *you* into a fish and eat you, too! Where's my fish? I demand my fish. Give me those fish standing there! Give them to me or I'll tear the place into splinters!"

Gregory was pretty badly shaken. He kept tugging at his mother until he got her on her way.

"William," said Aunt Agatha, "aren't you ashamed of yourself calling me names like that? You know very well I could have married a dozen men if I'd wanted. You shouldn't talk like that even if you *are* insane!"

"Lemme eat her!" howled Bill. "Lemme gobble her up and crack her bones for the marrow! Lemme rip her apart and eat her, pocketbook and all!"

Aunt Agatha could not stand any more of it. She hastened after the retreating group and left Bill laughing wildly with tears of remorse cascading down his cheeks.

He collapsed upon the bunk. "Why was I ever born? Why, oh, why, was I *ever* born?"

"To let me laugh myself to death," said Bill in quite another voice.

I closed the grate upon Case 21 and hurried back to the office.

SOMEHOW Cotter had gotten them all composed again by stating that Bill was in good hands and that, in

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no case, would anybody know the sad pass to which the patient had come, except the family itself.

"He is not always violent," said Cotter. "The chances are he might go for a long, long while without showing any symptoms whatever. But it is sure that he would eventually relapse. If you get a good psychiatrist to attend him, however, I shall gladly relinquish him to you—"

It was a cunning jab. Gregory instantly cried: "Oh, no! No, no, doctor! We have all the faith in the world in your ability to keep him from harm and perhaps even to cure him—"

"It may take years," said Cotter.

"If it takes a century," said Gregory, "the task is yours!"

"But the expense—"

"He is our responsibility. I attend," said Gregory, "to all such business affairs of the family. William has no money in his own right, but that is no reason for us to abandon him. He is, after all, our blood kin, my own brother. And I mean to take care of him. Yes, indeed, I shall. My lawyer shall have orders to pay your account on the first of each month. But only, mind you, on the condition that nobody hears any more from William."

"It is all very sad," said Cotter.

"Very, very sad," said Gregory. And then, in haste: "It is getting very late and I think we should be going. Come, mother. Come, Aunt Agatha. Good-by, Dr. Cotter."

"Good-by, good-by," said Cotter, still managing to look depressed. "He'll have the very best of care, be assured. Good-by, good-by."

He closed the door behind them and for a whole minute did nothing but walk around his office and chuckle.

"He may," I said, "be curable. There is something funny about this whole case, Cotter."

"Curable?" cried Cotter. "Curable? Bill Greyson? Hah, hah! What will you think of next, René? He's mad as a hatter and you know it! And he really *is* mad!"

"Just the same—"

"My case, my dear fellow. My case. Take care of your own. Splendid fellow, that Gregory. Perfectly splendid! All business. No nonsense. Oh, I say, René, how about a drink? It really requires a drink!"

I shook my head and went away.

MEANWHILE poor Bill was sick with the realization that his last chance had gone out the door. For he well knew his elder brother Gregory. There were two definite sides to his family—his mother's and his father's. His father had pulled himself up by his spurs and had made the name Greyson what it was. But, in recent years, his father had been so totally disinterested in any of his family and so kindly toward anything in a bottle that it was unlikely that any help should ever come from that direction. Indeed, Gregory had the Greyson fortunes so firmly in his checkbook that the old man wouldn't have been able to have scraped up more than a few thousand to bribe Bill out. And Bill was just as sure that he would never be right again as he was of the sun rising the next morning and going down each night.

"Why did you do it?" he wept.

"Why did you tear me up with your condemned fish hooks in the first place?" snapped Trigon. "Me, Trigon, captain of the Royal Guards. *Trigon*, terror of the waves! And you've made me the laughingstock of half the deep! Now, don't blubber around about what I've done to you. Just think of what you've done to me!"

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"But it's the end! I'll be here the rest of my life!"

"Ho, ho!"

"And I'll never see the light of day again!"

"Ha, ha!"

"And Ginger—"

"Say! Ginger! That's that swell-looking human girl! Are you sure you won't ever get out of here now?"

"I might."

"That's a snicker."

"I'm sure I will!"

"Trying to scare me away from Ginger, are you? Well, it won't work."

"You wouldn't!"

"Why not? Every girl's got a right to choose whom she pleases. You haven't ever seen me. And I wouldn't want to boast, but I'm a pretty swell-looking Triton, if I do say it myself. Why, the nymphs almost die of delight whenever I come around."

"Or of fright," said Bill.

A guard came drifting by to see what all the muttering was about and Bill hailed him with a sudden inspiration. "Frank!"

"Yeah?" said Frank, thrusting his head through the grate.

"Frank, I've got a few dollars in my pocket that they didn't find. If I gave you five bucks, could you get me some bottles of beer?"

"Well—"

"Here's five," said Bill persuasively.

Frank hesitated and then took it. He shuffled away.

"Beer?" said Trigon. "What's this?"

"You like fish. I like beer. Besides, I'm thirsty."

"Beer. Do you eat it?"

"You drink it."

Trigon found nothing to object to in that, and so he resumed his discussion of Ginger.

"Tonight," said Trigon, "I'm going to leave you in peace, once and for all."

"You'll never get out."

"No? That's how little you know about Elementary Military Magic."

"I don't think you can do it."

"You'll see. Why, I haven't got a soldier in my command that can't walk through barriers and make himself invisible and chew up steel bars. You human beings give me an ache in the guts. And that's only *Elementary* Military Magic."

Bill sighed and tried to lie down. But Trigon was warming to his subject and so Bill found that he had to sit up. Trigon rattled on, regaling Bill with boastful stories about the prowess of his troops in battles of the deep. After a while Frank came back and slid the bucket of beer through the grate and hurried away.

"You sure this ain't poison?" said Trigon.

"I've drunk it all my life. I like it better than water." And Bill took a deep draft of it. "Not bad."

"No. Not bad," said Trigon.

Bill took another drink. And then several more over a period of several minutes. He had about two quarts of beer there to begin. He had about a quart left when Trigon spoke.

"Say, this really isn't bad! Come on, let's finish it."

Bill quaffed steadily.

"Jumpin' jimfish," said Trigon. "Why haven't you been drinking this stuff all along. Say, it's won—*hic*—wonderful! Ish marveloush. I mean it's swell! Say, maybe you humansh—humans—have got the right idea—*hic*—when you c'n think up shom-shomthing like thish here beer! C'mon, lesh drink shome more."

Bill didn't dare grin even to himself. He drained off the remaining quart and set down the empty

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bucket. Truth told, two quarts of beer was a pretty stiff dose for him to take and he felt all aglow himself. But he was used to alcohol.

Trigon was not.

"Lesh get shome more of thish stuff," said Trigon. "Lesh . . . lesh get shome more— Lesh— *Zzzzzz*."

Bill found that he couldn't stand up, so limp and heavy was Trigon. And so he stretched out and whistled for Frank.

"That was pretty good beer," said Bill. "I've still got a few dollars left and if you'll bring me two quarts of it every eight hours I'll pay you two dollars every time."

"You're takin' it pretty easy," said Frank. "I guess it won't do any harm. Fact is, you look and sound like you used to before you went around tying knots in lamp-posts."

"There's an explanation for that," said Bill. "And there's something else you can do for me, Frank. In fact, you're the only one around here I'd really trust to do it for me."

"Well—I guess I might."

"Frank, there's a library upstairs that's got every kind of a book in it you can think of. How about getting me that volume of Covell's 'Hypnotism'?"

"Well—"

"Of course if you want me to get violent again—"

"Oh, no! No, indeed. I'll get it for you, Mr. Greyson."

Bill lay back and sighed deeply. He had a chance, a very slender chance. He only had about fifty dollars in his money belt and he would have to stretch that on beer as long as he could. When he ran out, maybe— But for the next few days Ginger was safe anyhow. And time would tell.

THE STATE of Bill Greyson was a matter of great interest at Balm Springs, for not even the manic-depressive in Cell 6 liked to think of what might happen should Bill Greyson take it into his head to tear out of the place. Guards, passing the front entrance, always glanced at the knot in the lamp-post there and, when called upon to put a strait jacket upon a patient, never failed to recall how Bill Greyson had burst out of one—and a confining coil of rope as well.

It was all against Bill's chances that he was obviously a brawny lad. His shoulders, developed by a polo mallet and boxing gloves and fencing, to name a few, were impressive anyway and it did not require a very great imagination to apply the feats of Samson to Bill. In addition to this, violent psychopaths, being single-track in intention, have often achieved very startling triumphs of strength.

And so it was that if Bill had suddenly begun to crochet a shirt out of window bars, no one would have been particularly astonished. But when it was breezed about that Bill had not made a wild move for days and had even taken to reading—an ominous foreboding settled over the place. It is axiomatic that when a mental sufferer quiets down he is getting ready to flare up.

Cotter, too, was alarmed by these signs of sanity, for Bill had not roared for fish once in the past week. And Cotter began to scout for the reason. I already knew it, but I hadn't said anything, for it has always been my policy that if anything calms a patient it is best to give it to him. And five or six quarts of beer a day aren't likely to make a drunkard out of a man whose capacity was known to be around two quarts of Scotch. But it was, after all, Cotter's case and Cotter's sanitarium.

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Now, when a doctor finds that a patient does well under certain conditions or upon a certain diet, he is professionally bound to expand the medical knowledge of the world by making a test. And when Cotter found out it was beer that had coincided with Bill's calmness, he, of course, had to make a test of beer. Does beer have a quality which is soothing to a psychopath? Is it the yeast? Does the bacteriological effect produce a counterirritant? There was only one way to find out. If Bill should be taken off beer, would he return to his usual state of madness?

Cotter, one morning, collared Frank and took his beer can away from him and threatened any guard with mayhem who should even mention beer to Bill Greyson.

Bill, for some hours, did not know about it. He kept expecting Frank and could not concentrate upon his book. For Trigon had awakened with a booming head and was feeling much abused.

The routine had broken down for the first time. Trigon would wake up with a terrible thirst and would mutter and complain and then, to get rid of the ache, would take his beer like a British private. Fortunately he knew nothing about singing and so merely retained a pleasurable silence and finally drifted back to sleep. Perhaps the effect would have differed with any other beverage than beer.

"You're holding out on me," complained Trigon. "You got the beer but you won't give it to me. Get some, you lunk-brained freak or I'll tear you apart."

"Now, take it easy," said Bill. "The beer will be along pretty soon and I'll drink it as soon as it arrives."

"You been saying that for the last four hours. Do you want me to get sore?"

"*Shhh!*"

"Don't shush me, damn you! All you can do is sit there and read. What in the name of a gorgon are you reading now?"

"It's a story about planes."

"What?"

"Planes. Machines that fly in the air."

"Yah! I'll bet it is! I'll bet you've been reading anything but what you tell me you read."

"You should have studied your lessons when you were little," said Bill gently.

"Who the seven sins wants to know how to read?"

"It's a good way to pass the time."

"You better get me some beer or I'll pass the time some place else. You think I'm going to hang around here with a head like this? I'll bet there's barrels of the stuff in the town. And I know something else in that town that I'm going to take along with me. All right, shudder! But can I help it if I'm so good-looking that I could take your girl away from you? And without trying, either!"

AT THAT MOMENT footsteps sounded in the corridor and Cotter thrust his head to the grate. "What's this? Talking to yourself again?"

"No," said Bill.

"He is so!" said Trigon. "Let me out of here or I'll tear the place down and use you for the sledge hammer! It's a hell of a note! No beer!"

Cotter grinned with satisfaction. "I don't allow my guards to be bribed. And if you get any beer it will be because I think you ought to have it, not because you think so. Perhaps next week, when I've examined the situation, I may let you have more beer. But not until then."

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"You can't do that!" shouted Bill.

"Now, now," said Cotter. "Calm yourself."

"You don't understand!" wailed Bill. "If I don't—I crave beer!"

Trigon had almost been put on the track and Bill perspired. Cotter went away, leaving gloom behind him.

"That settles it," said Trigon. "By the holy hump of a hell-born horse, I'm on my way to a place where I can get beer."

"I won't let you out," protested Bill.

"Oh, you won't, huh? Well, just you try and keep your jaws shut—"

"But I'm thinking about you!" cried Bill. "I don't want you to get hurt."

"Huh?"

"I said I don't want you to get hurt before I can get your help. And you've got to help me."

"Oh, I have, have I?"

"You bet you have! Don't you dare leave me."

"Say," said Trigon, "wait a minute. I'm suspicious of you. You try to work things backward on me and you almost got away with it once. Just why do you want to get rid of me?"

"But I don't! I want you to stay right where you are!"

"That's obvious. You want me to stay right where I am because of your girl— Oh, my head! If I could only get my wits untangled. You sure you haven't got any beer under the bed?"

"The only thing I can do for you is to erase the pain mentally," said Bill, not daring to hope.

"There's something cockeyed— Ouch! My head!"

"You're getting all boiled up and that makes your head hurt," said Bill. "In fact, your head hurts so much that, truth be told, I want to get rid of you at any cost. There, the truth's out."

"So you're trying to tangle me up— Ouch!"

"Now, look: I'm going to let you out but if I don't cure your headache I can't cure mine. It's all a matter of eyes. Your eyes hurt, don't they?"

"Sure, they hurt. How the blasted barracuda could they help but hurt?"

"Now, look where I look," said Bill. "You see that nail up there on the wall, just above the level of your eyes?"

"Sure."

"Well, you just look at that very fixedly and the first thing you know you'll be all comfortable."

"Well—it won't do any harm. All right, I'm looking at the nail."

"Keep looking at it. Now, in a very short time you are going to get a sleepy feeling. You are going to get a sleepy feeling. You are going to get a sleepy feeling. You are getting sleepy . . . you are getting sleepy . . . you are getting sleepy . . . you are dozing off . . . you are dozing off. . . . You don't notice anything unusual about this . . . nothing unusual about this. . . . It is just as pleasant an approach to natural sleep as you have ever experienced." Bill's voice was monotonous and drowsy. "Your eyelids are heavy. . . . Your eyelids are almost closed now. . . . Directly you will have to close your eyes. . . . You just cannot keep awake. . . . See? They are closing . . . now they are almost ready to close . . . now they will close and you are ready to sleep. . . . S-l-e-e-p!"

After a few moments of silence, Bill said, very gently: "Nothing will wake you. Nothing can hurt you. You can open your eyes but you will stay asleep. Now raise your arm." Bill's arm raised. "You won't wake up. Nothing can wake you up ex-

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cept me. You are sound asleep but you won't wake up no matter what I tell you to do—you can't wake up. Now, you can't bend your arm. You can't move until I tell you how to move and then you will move exactly as I say. There is nothing that can hurt you. You are fully in my power. You can't wake up. Many hours from now I shall give you a command to wake and then you shall wake. But any time I wish to put you back into this sleep all I have to do is snap my fingers and you shall be asleep anew."

There was a deep quiet within him. The arm stayed straight out.

"You can now drop the arm," said Bill. The arm dropped.

"Now," said Bill, "there are certain things in this cell which you have not before noticed. One of them is a polar bear. The polar bear is a big, shaggy, white animal that loves to eat Tritons and can do so without any difficulty, and I am the only one who can protect you from that polar bear because he is a pet bear that I have trained to eat Tritons. He is sitting over in that corner and you can now see him. He has very large teeth and he developed them by eating Scyllas raw. He is sitting there and any time I wish I can make him do anything I want. I am very powerful and he will not do anything I do not want him to do. I have the strength of twenty polar bears and so I can keep him from getting you. But if you should try to leave me you will have to step out of me and then, no matter how invisible you are, that polar bear can see you and he'll eat you. And so you are very much afraid of getting out of me and out of my protection.

"And, another thing, you cannot leave me until I tell you you can. You will try, but all the time you will not be able to do so. I can hold you as long as I wish and all I have to do to put you back into a sleep such as this is to snap my fingers. And if I snap my fingers you will be back asleep and totally under my control. You have absolutely no will of your own and you cannot use your strength at all unless I want you to use it that way. Your muscles will obey only the action impulses of my own mind. You have no way to read my thoughts and anything I think to myself has no bearing whatever upon you.

"And there sits that polar bear just waiting to eat you should you try to leave me. He had a Scylla for breakfast but that didn't satisfy his hunger—"

Now, it probably would have been all right if Bill had not kept stressing that polar bear. But Bill did not have too much faith in his ability to keep this swaggering, boasting Trigon under his thumb, and so he had an auxiliary. Had he been able to take a few more days to his study he would have succeeded better, as following events showed.

THERE is one thing of which a Triton might be conceived to be afraid and that is a seagoing land-animal; as such it might be expected to have any kind of qualities, all unknown. Bill stressed the Triton's fear of a polar bear when he should probably have stressed his own control of the Triton. Then, too, the news, which could not be denied by anything hypnotized into its belief, came as a very definite shock to Trigon. Normally he would have blustered and, perhaps, laughed. But in hypnosis he was far from normal. He was single-tracked into a shocking belief; and fear, instead of Bill, took charge.

Bill had probably envisioned a

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nice, calm period wherein he could make the Triton his complete slave. He got a hurricane from the seed of placidity.

Trigon shivered. Trigon leaped up. Trigon bawled: "A polar bear! A polar bear! Keep him away! Don't let him get me!" Bill was yanked up with Trigon, naturally. But before Bill could say or do anything more, Trigon was on his way out of there.

With one violent yank he pulled the grate from its hinges. And then, with furious strength, began to rip the door asunder. The door had been built to stay there, having been made of alloyed steel and possessing a large assortment of locks and hinges. And one by one parts began to fall like shrapnel in the corridor and the cell. The whole building quivered under the onslaught.

Bill howled an unheeded protest. To see his hands do such horrifying things; to feel his skin being ripped away in chunks! And to know that, once again, he was outward bound on a reign of wreckage which would probably end with a grave. For the citizens might not shoot into the air this time.

Guards on all floors charged toward the scene, snatching up billies and ropes and nets. Cotter was howling unheard orders. Patients everywhere set up a dreadful caterwaul. An excited steno screeched into the phone for police. Bedlam ruled Bedlam.

By this time Bill was fairly convinced that an amateur should not tamper with the art of hypnotism; for, instead of having the situation under control, he had a maniac on his hands!

A Triton, stark, slobbering, screaming mad.

Nobody but Bill, of course, had any accounting for the matter and Bill all along had been so firmly convinced that nobody would believe him that he had not uttered a word of true explanation. And so, although there were at least three men at Balm Springs who could have helped Bill snap Trigon out of that spell, no one knew what was wrong. And Bill was going through such violent exertions that he quite forgot the directions which he had casually read concerning ways to snap subjects out of hypnotic trances.

A howling, yowling, maniac Triton finally got through the door. And where Trigon wanted to go, so must Bill. And Bill offered a horrifying spectacle. He looked about twice his size and was moving so rapidly that he resembled a bomb streaking through paper obstacles—on the verge of exploding at any moment. But on his face was a strange, bewildered expression as though he desperately wanted to do something to stop all this activity before he himself was battered to bits.

People leaped into his path and were struck aside to land in very bad need of repair. A rope was thrown around him, and the rope was burst as though only twine. Doors were slammed and bolted before him, but only succeeded in slowing him down for an instant.

And all the while a terrified roar rolled out of him: "The polar bear! He's after me! Don't let him get me! *The polar bear!*"

NO POLAR BEAR could have done the things that Bill and company were doing to Balm Springs. The glittering halls were strewn with wreckage; the doors were split asunder; chairs and tables in the reception rooms were so much kindling wrapped with torn magazines; broken lamps, broken tile, broken heads!

"The polar bear!" Bill was heard

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to howl. "Don't let him get me!"

And he began to use a loose door as a cudgel.

"Help, help! He's after me!"

"For the love of Mike!" cried Bill himself. "For the love of Mike, quit it!"

"The polar bear!"

And three guards were caught by a falling wall.

"Save me!"

And Cotter was thrown through a window and halfway across the lawn.

The very roof was threatening to collapse when Trigon got his next idea. And, having gotten it, he headed in a straight line eastward. He went through the front door and carried it like a new style of collar for about ten feet when it fell apart in his wake. And then he halted for a moment, having seen that a barricade had been hastily thrown across the gate to bar his egress. Bill was made to glance behind him and, once more, came the wail: "The polar bear!"

Some local inhabitants came rallying toward him. Bill was seen to seize at a pile of bricks and then the bricks went straight out with machine-gun velocity and number and the guard was gone. But there still remained the barrier, part of which was a truck.

Bill and partner snatched at the lamp-post on the left from its base and waved all ten feet of it aloft with the battle cry:

"The polar bear!"

The battering ram was leveled and the charge swooped down the walk. The post hit the barrier and moved it not. It was withdrawn and full attention was given to the wall itself. Once, twice, thrice the ram blasted at the bricks and then, in a shower of brick chips and dust, they went through.

Once more Bill was made to glance behind him and even he was hard put to keep himself from seeing that imaginary polar bear.

"He's coming! Save me!" roared Trigon.

A concrete mixer was just ahead, but try as he would, Bill could not deviate. The workmen had already formed a protection brigade with shovels. It was like a bomb hitting in their midst. Tools and hats and stray humans soared. The mixer went over with a gurgle and spilled its contents upon a foreman.

*"The polar bear!"*

Right ahead was the sea. The long dock running out to it was cluttered with building materials. But Trigon wasn't going to be delayed by going around them. Planks and nail kegs sailed seaward. Gulls flashed skyward in terror. Trigon kept on going.

"Stop!" shrieked Bill. "Stop! "You'll drown me!"

"The polar bear!" screeched Trigon.

There was the end of the dock. There was the blue Atlantic stretching out for thousands of miles. To Trigon it was safe and knowable and *home.*

They went down in a long dive and then kept right on going down!

BILL held his breath. Green water went frothing away, parted by his face. The white sand bottom swooped up and fish swooped away. And then Bill was made to swim with a strangely fishlike motion which impelled him through the water like a torpedo.

Bubbles were whisking out of his clothing and then, when he could no longer hold his breath, out of his nose. He knew he was finished. He would drown and his body would be washed ashore and everybody would

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say it was very good riddance. Maybe even poor Ginger would say so. Maybe Gregory would throw a party over it. He was finished!

He had read somewhere that the quickest way to drown was to inhale the water. That made it painless. And certainly, the way his ears were hammering, he had to do something to ease the stress.

He mentally consigned himself to whatever destiny awaited him and sought, in an instant, to make his peace with his Creator. And then he took the breath.

He breathed very deeply and felt

*The lamp-post came up by the roots. The sheriff's men scattered as Bill went to work with it—*

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the water go sighing into him. All before him had been a red haze of pain.

But now it cleared!

He was swimming like mad, to be sure, but he wasn't having any difficulty about breathing. He took another breath and exhaled it. There wasn't anything uncomfortable about it. Of course it was slightly salty, but even that was better than carbon monoxide on Broadway.

What was this?

He could breathe under water?

He was so surprised that he almost laughed aloud. Eagerly he took more and deeper breaths. Of course, it was possible that he had already died and was bound to a sailor's heaven, but he hadn't seen his corpse settling to the bottom anywhere, and until he saw that he would keep on believing that he was alive.

Perhaps the fact that he had a Triton inside him accounted for this ability to breathe. Perhaps he had suddenly developed gills—and he thought he could feel water going out of his ears.

Question was, when would Trigon stop this terrific pace?

Trigon wasn't going to stop any place. Not until he was assured of lots of leagues between himself and any possible polar bear. But the fact that he was in his element had a cooling effect upon him and he sped less swiftly and then slowly until they were almost stopped.

There was a coral grotto which looked inviting and Bill was headed toward it. At the last moment a rather ugly fish of several hundredweight came ripping into view, all teeth and grin, ready to defend his home with his life.

Bill was going at torpedo speed once more and the fish was left behind. After a little they came to a white sand knoll which offered wide vistas on every side and here they saw fit to pause.

They sank down upon the yielding bottom—or top—and gave over to a spell of hard breathing after all the exertion which had been put out.

And, after a little, soft *zzz's* came from Bill's inside, so he knew that Trigon had dropped off to sleep.

Bill sat still, his head still whirling at all that had taken place, inspecting the minor cuts and abrasions he had received in their wild flight. The salt didn't sting, which was also very odd.

But Bill was getting used to odd things by this time. He sank back with a sigh and contemplated the view.

## IV.

It was very quiet and apparently serene in the shadows of the deep; sunlight, undulated by the waves far above, made a constantly shifting pattern as though light had become rain; there were no horizons, the distance fading out into a deeper and deeper green which became, at last, opaque.

At first the expanse seemed tenantless. The white floor, gently rolling, reached out like a desert become cool and luminescent. The only moving things were the tall sea shrubs which swayed in a graceful, unified dance as though blown in slow motion by some unfelt breeze. It was lazy and restful and lovely, a true land of fantasy where nothing was ever hurried and where time had stopped, a realm of sleepy peace in which action was unthinkable. The soft shades blended in sweet harmony like some painting of a magic brush, glassed in three dimensions by the glowing cover of a sunlit surface.

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That, thought Bill, was what had happened. He had somehow wandered into a painting of unsuspected depth. When he looked up to the surface it was as though a brilliant sheet had been spread there for the purpose of shutting out reality. It was hard to believe that keels cut through that polished ceiling. How many times had he sped across the top, seeing only the endless and monotonous platoons of waves all marching in step to arrive at some far shore and then, pointlessly, march back. How often he had been bored with the endless leagues of water stretching dully to the round horizon! But here! Could it be possible that anything could be as beautiful and restful as this? Why, even his case-hardened soul was drunk with the delicate wonderland into which he had been dragged. If there were any Lotus Land, that land was surely beneath the surface of the sea!

He watched the patches of tall and fine-spun plants weave and bow like slim ballet dancers enchanted and made to dance so slowly forever. His head began to nod in sleepy rhythm as though he, too, heard the song.

Lazily his gaze shifted from generalities, for there were soft colors in bewildering array where he had thought there was only sand. Pinks and greens, blues and oranges, yellows and purples and reds—shells and tiny fish and stones and minute flowers. There was no end to the variety, for it would have taken him a thousand days to have counted all the different things within his sight.

And there was life in the plants, too. Convict fish, unseen until now because of the camouflaging effect of their stripes, lurked with a hundred other varieties in the depths of the miniature trees and grottoes, fish which ranged in size from microscopic to the length of a finger, each one dissimilar in color from the next kind.

From somewhere a foot-long fellow came cruising up to inspect the strange being at an adventurous range and hung off a yard from Bill's face, looking him eye to eye, mouthing soundless "ohs."

"Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh," said the fish.

"Oh, oh, oh, oh," said Bill.

The fish fled and then, ashamed of having run, came part way back.

"What did you say?" it said.

Bill was startled. Now he was certain that he had drowned and was a ghost—or that he had, at last, gone wholly insane. And it didn't seem to be talking anything like English even though Bill was perfectly able to understand its language. Could it be that he had soaked a great deal of knowledge out of Trigon which he had not otherwise suspected? Well—if he could breathe down here—

"I said: 'Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh!'" said Bill.

"That's not very polite. In fact, it's downright silly. 'Oh, oh, oh, oh!' Indeed! Oh, oh, what?"

"Well—just 'oh, oh,' that's all. When you breathe you look like you saying "Oh, oh,' too, if you mean to 'Oh, oh'!"

"Now, I must say! That's downright rude. You look like you are saying 'Oh, oh,' too, if you mean to get fresh about it. Of course, I don't blame you much. I'm just a poor pilot fish and not a very big one, either, and I don't look at all dangerous and so anybody can insult me who pleases and I can't say anything at all about it."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings."

"Oh, that's all right. Don't apolo-

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gize to *me*. I guess I know how little *I* amount to. Nothing nice ever happens to me."

"Come now," said Bill. "I'm sure that it does."

"Oh, no, it doesn't. Never. But then what can one expect when he has to consort with sharks?"

"Sharks?"

"Very rude. You are almost polite compared to a shark. And, oh, the years of slavery I have had to put in for them. It is enough to stunt one's growth. And sometimes when my keen instinct has led a shark straight to his destination, he never so much as leaves me a scrap of dinner for my pay. Oh, don't try to console me. Nobody could do that. Oh, no. I never have any luck at all. I can hope and pray and lead an exemplary life, but still I never have any luck."

"Now, now. You must have some luck. You're alive, aren't you?"

"I'd rather be dead," sighed the pilot fish, "than to have such a hunger as I have now. Oh, no, I never have any luck. Why, just now when I came along I was sure the fates were being kind to me by leaving a dead sailor here to be eaten—and not a shark in sight. And when I came up to eat, what do I find but a man that talks like a fish. One has to make the best of things, I suppose. But oh, it is hard. Pardon me, but do you mind if I stay around and eat on you after a patrol finds you?"

"A patrol?"

"You have a very annoying habit of repeating what I say. 'Sharks? A patrol?' That isn't very polite."

"I meant: 'What do you mean by a patrol?' "

"You didn't say that. You just said: 'A patrol?' Oh, goodness, You sound like that echo at the Big White Cliff."

"Well—what *did* you mean, then. Please."

"I like that 'please.' It is much better. Too bad you are not a civilized being, but just a man. I can almost detect something decent about you."

"Please tell me."

"About what?"

"About that patrol."

"Why, the Titan patrol, of course."

"Triton?"

"Don't *do* that," said the pilot fish. "And I didn't say 'Triton.' I said 'Titan'. Can't you even talk without barking what you think I said? And don't you even know that you are in the Empire of Oceanus, the Titan?"

"But I thought Neptune was king here."

"Oh, goodness! Oh, my gills and flippers. Didn't you ever go to *school?* Why, you are the most ignorant thing I ever talked to! First you couldn't even begin to be polite and now you don't know oceanography! Don't you ever let a Titan patrol hear you say a thing like that. Why, they wouldn't give you a quick death!"

"What? You mean they would anyway?"

"Why, that's the order. Don't you even know the Oceanus Penal Code? Or the Poseidon Penal Code? They're both the same and yet you don't know even one. Oh, my uncle the big-finned shark! Section Thirty-one, Article A, Paragraph 1, section a, clearly says: 'All traffic at any thoroughfare such as a channel shall give way to any Royal Messenger—' No, no! Oh, you have me all upset. Article Thirty-two—I mean Section Thirty-two—Article B, Section a, clearly says: 'All nymphs, monsters, sharks, et cetera—I am one of the et cetera, you see—all gods, demigods, harpies and officers of the

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guard, et cetera, will capture and down or otherwise kill on sight all sons of man who have no evidence of having made appropriate sacrifices and representatives to Oceanus Rex within the twelvemonth preceding as being citizens under the rule of the thrice-accursed and so-called greater god, Neptunis.' "

BILL GLANCED around him, feeling very uncomfortable. He had heard that law before from the lips of Trigon. And it occurred to him now that he was not only a human being, to be killed on sight, but also the possessor of Trigon, the much-wanted Triton who, being not only a son of Neptune but also an ex-border captain, was required by both royal houses.

"You had *better* look around," said the pilot fish. "I am theoretically supposed to kill you but, of course, that is impossible for I am only a poor, weak pilot fish. However, I hope you won't mind if I stay around. It has been such a long while since I had a really decent meal." He adjusted his depth by swimming in an upward spiral and came back to hover before Bill. "You won't say that about this being Neptune's realm, anyway, for it really is not. And, besides, it would be very impolite for you to steal my meal that way."

"What would they do if I did say it?"

"Why, that would be treason and only Oceanus himself deals with traitors. He usually has them cut up into cubes and fed to sea slugs, and he makes canes out of their spines."

Bill again looked around. A sigh escaped him.

"Now what?" said the pilot fish.

"This is such a peaceful scene."

"What?"

"Well, don't you think so?"

The pilot fish laughed hollowly. He swam in a dismal circle and then motioned with his nose toward a flower. "Look at that for a moment."

It was an anemone and a particularly beautiful one of considerable size. The petals seemed to be ecstatically caressing the water all about. It was very beautiful and Bill almost smiled, sinking back into the calmness and marveling at the subtle coloring of the languorous surroundings. But, in an instant, a very small fish was frightened out from behind a rock to flee in blind terror from something unseen. It did not even touch the anemone but the anemone took care of that. There was a quick swirl and the tiny fish was entangled in the suckerlike petals. The flower closed in upon itself until it was no more than a tube. The fish was being digested while still alive.

"And look at that," said the pilot fish, with doleful satisfaction.

A number of small crabs were feeding industriously upon the corpse of a lobster.

"And that," said the pilot fish.

From the distance came the flashing of a school of small fish and Bill had to peer very hard to see what made the disturbance. Then he saw a larger fish rushing through the formation, battering to the right and left with a powerful tail and leaving the dead and maimed in its wake. In leisurely fashion then the fellow went back the way he had come, making a meal of the wriggling wounded.

"Oh," said Bill.

"Wait," said the pilot fish. "I see what he doesn't see."

Something about the size of a tarpon abruptly streaked down from a



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higher level, so swift the eye could not follow. There were several quick flashes and then the water was drifting with red fragments. The eater had been eaten.

The pilot fish laughed hollowly again. "Death. Nothing but death in the sea. Death, death everywhere. In an hour or two you also will die. And in a day or a month or a year, I will die. Death. Death everywhere."

INDEED, Bill found that the beauty of the scene was missing. These subtle shades had become hiding places for destruction. Those nervous little fish in the tall sea plants met death by the dozen in a matter of minutes. The white sand carpet was crawling with hidden catastrophe.

"Oh, well," said the pilot fish, "it has always been so. There is talk of an International Brotherhood of the Sea but it will never come to anything. We must eat. And if we must eat, then there must be death for all. We live to die and others die that we may live. So it must be everywhere."

"Not among men."

"Bah. A turtle tried to tell me that once. He was very conceited about it. He said that men raised things in the earth and did not kill. But he changed his tune. One day he came thundering along, mad as can be. Some men had found his wife's eggs and had eaten them all, every one. I laughed at him. Maybe I shouldn't have laughed, but I did. But I shouldn't have, just the same. His brother told me sometime later that all they had found of my friend was his head. Some men had made a stew of him on the beach and had taken away his shell. So I shouldn't have laughed. But I did, every time he started one of those long-winded lies about how men were different. The only difference I can see about men is that they are always dead. Except you, of course, and that won't be long."

"I hope we're not on a patrol course."

"There is no patrol course. A couple minutes ago a shark went by above us and he'll head for a patrol station and tell them. If I hadn't been so sure you'd be dead soon, I'd have followed him. But I think I've got a right to take an hour or two off from my business when there's a good meal. However, when the patrol comes out the shark will probably be along with them and I may miss out even then, because then the shark would eat you. And a poor, weak pilot fish can't take anything but abuse from a shark. It was Nyor, I think, and he's particularly bad. He isn't any more polite than you are."

Bill thought it was high time he woke up Trigon. He hated to do it, for he was sure Trigon would go crazy all over again. But this was an emergency and, after all, Trigon knew the sea. Accordingly he stood up and shook himself violently.

A "ho" and a "hum" came out of him and then, perforce, he stretched and rubbed his eyes, feeling like an idiot as he always did when Trigon was too strong to be disobeyed.

"Hum! Well, I feel better. Have you got any beer—" Bill was made to give a start. "Huh? What's this? The sea?"

"You ought to know. You made me dive in and almost scared the wits out of me."

"*I* made you dive in! What a lie! How did you get out and how did you come here, of all places? Good nymphs, you foul-figured seal, do you think I'd come back down here if I was in my right mind? We've got to get away, do you hear me? Why, there isn't a cavern in the sea where I'd be safe!"

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"A shark just went after a patrol," said Bill.

"Who said so?"

"This pilot fish here."

BILL REALIZED then that he and Trigon were not speaking English, either, for the pilot fish appeared to understand. In fact, the pilot fish was flippergasted.

"You talk in two voices!" oh'ed the pilot fish.

"Who the seven sins are you?" cried Trigon.

"Gurk, sir. Gurk, pilot fish to Flight Seven, Squadron N, Wing Forty-nine, His Majesty's Royal Shark Patrol, sir." He was fidgety and uncertain, for there was no mistaking the note of accustomed command in Trigon's voice, even though the pilot fish did not know it was a Triton. "You . . . you frighten me, sir. Here I was talking with you and I didn't know and I'm . . . I'm sorry if I said anything, sir."

"You were talking with this fool?" said Trigon, evidently to Bill.

"Why, yes."

"How is it you can talk with fish?"

"I don't know. I must have gotten it subconsciously from you. I didn't even know fish could hear, much less talk."

"There's a lot you don't know," said Trigon. "Fish talk and hear with their gill membranes—"

"*Some* fish, that is," said Gurk. "Royal troops and—"

"Shut up," said Trigon. "By the feel of this current we're in Jurlack and that's Titan territory. Come on! We're heading for shore and in a hurry!"

"But they'll kill us the second we show up," said Bill. "The wreck you made out of things—"

"Is this some more herring business? Say, how can you breathe down here?"

"I guess I got that from you, too," said Bill.

Gurk was on the point of a nervous collapse, hearing a man talk to himself. And to hear two voices, so dissimilar, issuing from the same mouth, especially when one had such a royal note to it.

"You go look up corpses," said Trigon to Gurk. "And if you say a word of this to anyone I'll have your fins cut off and fed to the crabs and pack you in porcupines and gas you with squid. You understand?"

"Oh, yes, sir," said Gurk.

"Now swim along," said Trigon. And thereupon he followed his own suggestion by making Bill lift a little way and pick up speed.

"Rotten way to swim," said Trigon. "You're all legs."

"If you don't like it," said Bill, resentful at the thought of being manhandled anew, "you can jump out and beat it. I'm sick of you anyhow."

"Sure. Sure. Jump out! That sounds like you. Why, you octopus-eyed squirt, if I should happen to be seen around here I'd be yanked up to Oceanus and spread thin on a rock, a little at a time. I attacked his troops once and I must have killed about fifty of his best trident men before the rest surrendered. And I would have won the war, too, if there'd been any war. But my orders were false. Neptune robbed me. And as soon as Oceanus launched an attack, Neptune, the old bubble, said it was all my doing and wanted to court-martial me and hand me over to Oceanus for torture. Why, if I was caught—"

"What about Section Thirty-two, Article B, Section a—"

"You mean Section Thirty-one, Article A, Paragraph 1, Section a!" said Trigon. "'All nymphs, monsters, sharks—'"

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"I know what it says. I've heard it once too often."

"I should have obeyed it in the first place," said Trigon.

Bill was impeding their progress as much as he could. For he did not actually believe that death in the deep would be as swift as Trigon made out. At least it was not as definite as what awaited him ashore.

Gurk, the pilot fish, was following his habit of navigating. He had not gone away as ordered, but was slightly below Bill, leading the way to land, perhaps still hopeful that a patrol might catch Bill and so satisfy a certain gauntness of the stomach with which most pilot fish are afflicted.

"Come on," said Trigon impatiently. "There were about three sharks back there and they took off in a rush. Didn't you see them? They'll bring that patrol right down on top of us. Swim, you limp-legged excuse for a fish!"

Gurk, being able to speed when he wanted, made a dash out in front, executed a circle and then dived some distance away so as to be out of the line of attack. Trigon and Bill both saw the maneuver and Bill rolled a little to stare back and see a vague flash in the green above. The flash became several and then, with appalling speed of growth, the patrol became apparent.

"They smelled us!" raved Trigon. "Damn and double-damn you to Tartarus! Swim!"

Bill was all for it now. His arms and legs, with Trigon's whole-souled aid, began to flash until they blurred into near-invisibility.

"There's a cavern!" panted Trigon.

THEY DIVED into a valley and shot across it toward a dark hole which beckoned. A sleeping octopus at the entrance was unable to stir before they were by, and then, when the blast of motion had ceased throwing sand into his eyes, wasn't sure what had happened.

Trigon made them brake to a halt in the darkness. "Now listen to me. Take a deep breath and close your eyes. Hold it until you think your skull is going to pop apart and then make this sign in front of you very swiftly, spinning around the while. Try it now."

Bill tried it and his hand made the sign. But he could not hold his breath to the point of unconsciousness, and so failed in whatever Trigon wanted.

"You poor, miserable, rock-skulled droop!" raved Triton. "Now do it again!"

Bill did it again and this time Trigon would not allow him to exhale. The world was red and full of bursting lights, and still he was made to make the sign and spin about.

"Come around," snapped Trigon. "I think that's done it."

"Done what?"

"Made us invisible, of course."

Meanwhile the octopus, attributing the violent motion and the sand to the patrol, was offering argument outside the cave.

"I have my rights!" he rumbled. "This is my property. And if you haven't got a warrant, Pluto take you!"

"I am Dosga! Dosga, lieutenant of the Third Company, Eighth Regiment, Fifth Brigade and second Corps of the Royal Fin Guards. I am Dosga, Medal of Strategy by appointment to His Imperial Majesty Oceanus Rex! And by my brass and my saber I'll make you eat your own slimy arms if you don't move away from that door and let me get that *man!*"

"Man!" scoffed the octopus. "Whoever heard of a man swimming down

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here? I ought to know. I've eaten enough of them."

"You never ate a man in your life!" cried Dosga. "You toothless, witless, soulless, bald, evil, unnatural squid! If you don't know the special powers of patrol, I'll have you up for not memorizing the Code Penal of Oceanus! And you'll be tied in reef knots and rolled over knives until you won't be food for crabs! Stand aside!"

"I know my rights—" began the octopus.

"*Stand aside!*" And there came the sound of a blow.

"We've got to get out of here," whispered Trigon. "Now do what I tell you. Repeat after me: 'Rocks of Empire—'"

"'Rocks of Empire—'"

"'Soil of Hades, I command by the virtue of the Right of Ramus—'"

"'Soil of Hades, I command by the virtue of the Right of Ramus—'"

Trigon went on in swift, savage whispers and then commanded Bill, even while lances were poking into the depths of the cave, to say it all together. Bill tried, forgot part and was brutally reminded. He finally got all through it and then, with his hand, Trigon made a certain sign on the stone.

And by the very faint light of the place, Bill could see that they were moving through it!

And, having moved through it, they were on top of the cave and again in the open!

TRIGON CHUCKLED, barely audible even to Bill. Carefully, lest they disturb the water too much, they began to swim away.

Bill's head was whirling. He was not yet used to the company of this demigod and the realization of Elementary Military Magic made him gasp.

But it was not to any great avail. For there was the sun, throwing slanting rays through the clear, green depths and there under them was a shadow, accurately keeping pace with their progress. And before they realized it something had flashed down like a shell and Bill was struck such a terrific blow that he could not make more than a feeble motion as he drifted down to the floor. There were two or three more such blows. Dimly he knew that a patrol shark had dived to give him a hard swat with his tail, and then things went glimmering.

When he came around, shortly after, he was in the middle of a fight which had already thrown up such a fog of sand that it was impossible to make out the whole of any opponent. Sharks and lances and butting helmets appeared, struck and vanished.

Bill found that he had somehow gotten hold of a lance and was making great execution with it. He speared a shark very expertly, but he was so groggy that he regarded the feat much as he would have the efforts of another. For it was Trigon who fought. The sand whirling around them was taking on a reddish hue. Another shark dived, caught the point of the lance full in his teeth and, having swallowed three quarters of it so that it protruded out its back, could not even wiggle.

And then three soldiers descended all at once and pressed Bill to earth, pushing his head down into the sand until his ears roared and the world under his eyelids became astronomical.

He was almost out again when he was, at last, pulled to his feet. There were very thick and heavy leg irons on him and he was girded all about his torso by a thick coil of rusty anchor chain. A guard was fumbling

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in a puzzled fashion with a many-disked weight which normally served as a fin-cuff but which did not fit very well on a creature which had no fins. Finally, the impeding irons were finally locked upon him and he knew, if only from their weight, that while Trigon might possibly burst through strait jackets, he could never begin to spring these.

The white sand cloud was drifting away in the current, leaving the battlefield visible. It was not a nice sight. Three sharks, one dead and two in their final throes, were bobbing slowly over the bottom, one of them rising, belly-up, toward the surface. One soldier was sitting upon a rock looking somewhat ill and binding up a hole in his scaly "thigh" with a cloth from a belt wound kit. There was a small, red haze of blood about the puncture. Another, whose helmet was beyond repair, was trying to come around and was having a difficult time doing it.

"I am Dosga," said a powerful being before Bill. Dosga was standing upon his powerful fluked tail but not standing very solidly despite his obvious weight, for he kept rising and dropping a few inches as his bouyancy automatically adjusted itsel. His arms were short and muscled like his barrel torso; his fingers were webbed together and were armor-plated with scales; his mouth opened and shut constantly and, as it was very wide, made it appear that his face was breaking in half every few seconds; his ears were scarcely ears for they were backward and fanned continually in time to his mouth, evidently functioning as gills; of a nose there was no sign; his eyes were glassy and white-lidded like a shark's and abnormally large. The shape of him was streamline, for his head widened out to set into his shoulders and his shoulders tapered down into a tail. He wore a tunic which almost hid the fact that he was heavily scaled on the chest—as though he wore chain mail. Upon his head was an ancient thing of the early Grecian bronze period which had a metal plume and a grated visor—either wreck salvage or an heirloom.

"I am Dosga," he repeated. And then to make certain that a poor, stupid human understood what such an announcement amounted to—in case he could not talk the language—he pointed to the golden triangles on his shoulders which gave his rank and then to the conventionalized waves on his lapels which proclaimed him as an officer of Oceanus. Finally he indicated his sleeve insignia, embroidered in glowing thread, which showed the all-seeing eye of the patrol, finned on either side to represent speed. He touched his helmet to draw attention to the spouting volcano which symbolized the mighty race of Titans and which, by his wearing it, indicated his own royal lineage.

"I am Dosga," he said again and motioned toward Bill's confining chains. "And you are in the hands of the Royal Fin Guards. According to Section—"

"Section Thirty-two, Article B, Paragraph 1, Section a," said Bill, "you are under orders to kill all human beings on sight."

Dosga blinked thoughtfully. "You speak?"

"I am the one that's surprised," said Bill. "How is it that *you* can talk?"

"Hm-m-m," said Dosga. "There's something surpassing strange about this. Something very strange. Very strange. You talk our language, you swim nearly as fast as we, you breathe here, you have sufficient

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weight to keep you on the bottom, you seem to understand Elementary Military Magic and you fight like a true demigod."

"Thank you," said Bill. He wondered why Trigon had not spoken.

"No compliment intended," said Dosga stiffly.

"Then, no thanks intended."

"And you talk oddly," said Dosga. "You talk very rudely."

"My apologies."

Dosga was disconcerted. This *man* was evidently not much impressed by an officer of the Royal Fin Guards. "What are you doing here? I asked you that in the first place and you put me off."

"Same thing that you are," said Bill. "Standing here talking,"

Dosga scowled. When it came to him that he was being insulted he got angry. "You periwinkle-witted refuse of a tide flat! You are putting me off again. Let me give you a piece of good advice! When an officer of Oceanus tells you to answer a question, you had better answer it!"

"Why?" said Bill.

"Why . . . why— You'd better answer it, that's why!"

"But you are going to kill me in a moment, anyway," said Bill. "Isn't that enough?"

Dosga's face was grim. He whirled and bawled: "Bako! Bring your spear here! And now, *man*, if you have any last requests you had better make them for I have my orders and my orders are not to be disobeyed. You are not only a *man*, but you have also disrupted an area of His Majesty's Imperial Domain. Bako, spit this bloater before he drives us all mad!"

Bill shivered at the glinting spear but he did not display the fact. "The point is," said Bill, "*is* this His Majesty's Imperial Domain?"

"What?" said Dosga. "Wait, Bako. What was that?"

"I said that I doubted that this was His Majesty's Imperial Domain, unless, of course, you meant Neptune."

"What's this?" yelped Dosga.

Inside Bill a groan welled up. Trigon, very plainly, saw in this situation the end of everything.

"This, obviously, is the territory of Neptune," said Bill.

Gurk, the pilot fish, came darting in with "oh's" of horror. "I told you not to say that! I told you! Oh, there's no help for you now. You would have had an easy death—"

"Get away!" said Dosga. "Now, see here, *man*. I have stood quite enough from you as it is. When you talk you get me all mixed up. And to think that a pile-wormy, funk-bellied hogfish of a *man* dares talk to me at all makes me sick as a sea cow! And now you have the blasphemy to state that Oceanus is *not* emperor of the deep!"

"I don't know about the blasphemy part of it," said Bill, "but it does seem to me that you should study up on your oceanography. Quite obviously, Neptune is king here."

Dosga gave his tail such a switch that its blow against the sand was audible. "You see this helmet? You see the volcano on it? That's Titan! That's the symbol of the Titans! And you see these golden waves? That's the symbol of Oceanus. And yet you can stand there and state that we are *not* in the realm of Oceanus! Why, you fribble-witted farce, I'll carve out your heart and drink your blood! I'll break all your bones and spit you on coral! I'll use your hair for a mop and your teeth for dice! How dare you say that this is not the realm of Oceanus?"

"I don't know how I dared," said

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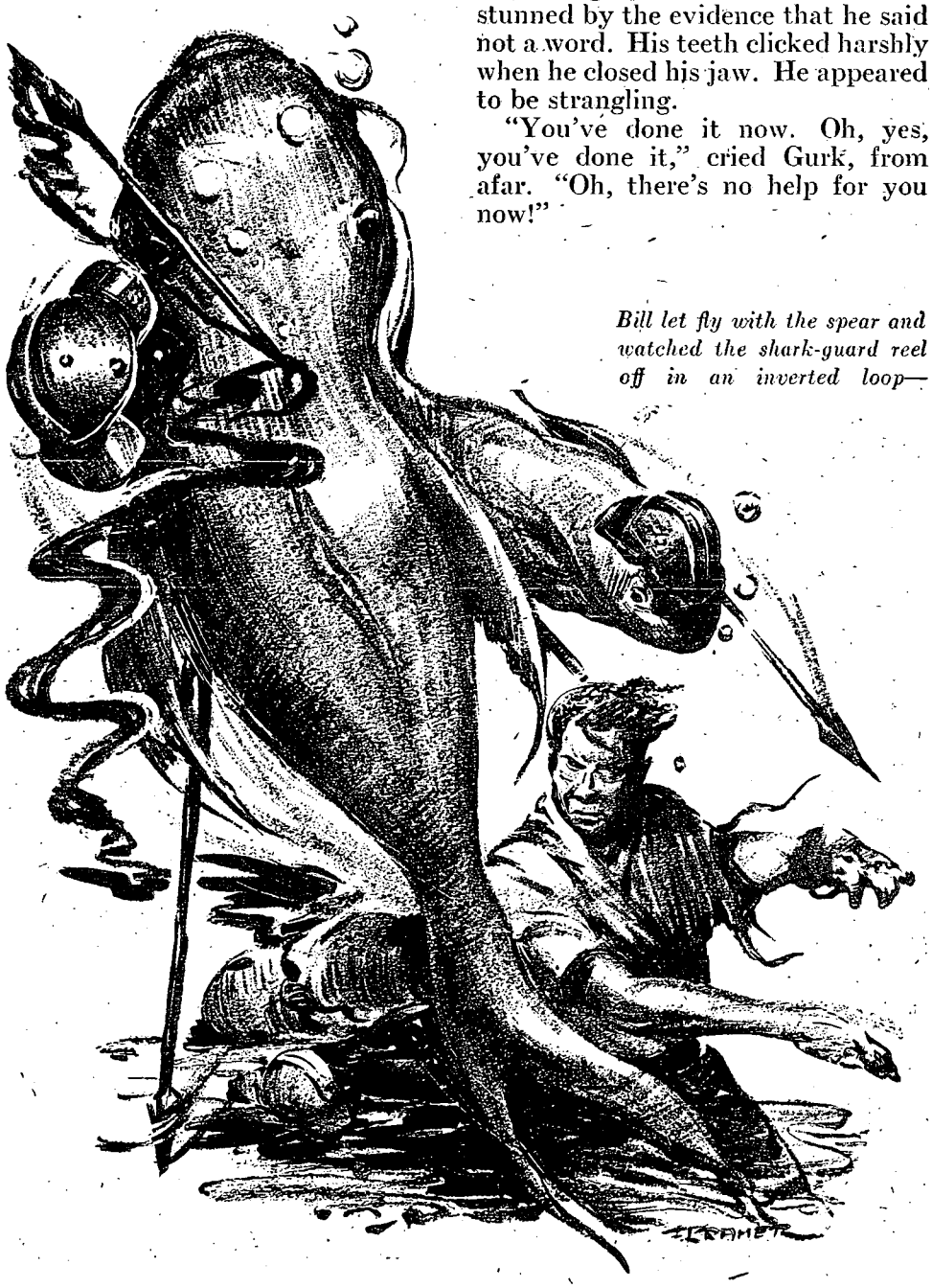
Bill. "But I said it. The fact that you wear those medals and badges is no proof that we are in the realm of Oceanus, for you could wear them just as well in the kingdom of Neptune. That you are here and that you are wearing them doesn't matter in the least."

Dosga opened his mouth to let out a mighty curse. But he was so stunned by the evidence that he said not a word. His teeth clicked harshly when he closed his jaw. He appeared to be strangling.

"You've done it now. Oh, yes, you've done it," cried Gurk, from afar. "Oh, there's no help for you now!"



*Bill let fly with the spear and watched the shark-guard reel off in an inverted loop—*

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"Bako!" Dosga finally managed. "I command you to take this *man* in custody. Yes, and take that octopus in custody. And that guppy of a pilot fish as well! Take everybody into custody! By the convulsions of a Cyclops, I'll have them fed to Porphyion! I'll have them skinned a layer at a time! I'll run slow drills through their heads and spikes through their spines and have their toes eaten off by an electric eel! Bako, form patrol! Forward, *swim!*"

With two soldiers towing him, Bill considered the sad twists of his destiny. If only he had never gone to that party where he had been formally introduced to Priscilla. Then, if he only had never pretended that he was mad. For he could hardly bring himself to review the events which had spread out from that single lie. He had pretended he was mad. Then, evidently, he had gone mad. Then Trigon had gone mad and now the entire world around him was mad. He had that strange guilty feeling that he himself had brought all this into existence. Just as a man will always look back from an accident and remember that he had thought about such an accident—with the result that he feels that the thought caused it—so Bill rued the chained thoughts which had brought him into this.

For there was no arguing with Dosga. There seemed to be a certain ingredient lacking in the characters of these beings. Certainly that characteristic had been lacking in Trigon. Only a joke of the most crudely practical sort could be appreciated by them. Perhaps if one of the shark squadron suddenly ran into a swordfish and got himself spitted, then everyone would think it a great piece of humor. But anything of a lighter nature passed them by.

Men a little shy on brains, thought Bill, were always shy on humor appreciation. Always he had avoided those around him who lacked a sense of humor for, somehow, he always got into trouble with them.

Bill might have looked a little deeper into this fact, but he was no philosopher or even a psychiatrist, barely a psychologist. These beings were all very close to death and disaster, for the sea is a brutal place where dying is taken almost as casually—and concurrently—as eating. And beings in sight of death have rather a serious regard for everything, for no one knows from which quarter death may strike next and, therefore, everything must be credited until it can be rejected.

Dosga, of course, could not begin to understand humor in any form short of serious accident. Bill knew this much; and Bill, towed swiftly along, began to act upon the fact.

In a very low voice, Bill said: "Trigon. Which way and how far is a border from here?"

Trigon had not had a word to say until now. "*Shhhh!* If they suspect I am here, what *won't* happen to us!"

"Plenty is going to happen anyway," said Bill.

"But you and I are in the hands of the Fin Guards of Oceanus! And these brass-brained stickers are too tough to be touched! You try to make a break for the border and then things *will* happen!"

Bill got a sudden insight into Trigon. The Triton was wise in the ways of his own realm and was thereby impressed. On land, not having any real knowledge of things, he was therefore careless of everything, for his nature was essentially brave. But here— Well, he could count on no help from Trigon. Valiantly as the Triton had fought

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the patrol, he had given up now.

"Only one thing could be worse," said Trigon. "To fall into the hands of Neptune's Royal Guards."

"Worse?"

"You'd see quick enough. Oceanus might kill you and keep you in the coral quarries. But if Neptune killed you—"

Bill swallowed in astonishment. "You mean even if they kill me I'm still in a mess?"

"Don't be so stupid," whispered Trigon. "If the guard here had killed you, they would have turned in your soul at Mariner's Rest and you could have taken it easy until Apollo drinks all the water out of the sea. Now, when Oceanus has you executed—and me as well—you'll be put to work. But if Neptune— Forget that border!"

"What *would* Neptune do?"

"WHY, he's got so many drowned sailors now that we can't keep track of them and he's been sending the worst of them to Tartarus to ease the overpopulation. He can't use any more dolphins or blackfish—"

"What have they got to do with it?"

"What else could you expect from a *man!*" snorted Trigon. "Dolphins and blackfish and so forth are the new forms of drowned sailors. Hasn't one ever spoken to you?"

"Maybe I couldn't talk his language."

"Well, it's a wonder one hasn't. We use to beat them and imprison them and they'd *still* run up alongside every ship and try to hail it. Haven't you ever heard of anybody talking to one?"

"I've seen hundreds of them clustering around ships and playing about the bows," said Bill, "but I don't think anybody has ever heard one speak."

"The *ears* you men have!" said Trigon. "But then, you are all so stupid you couldn't talk with a fish anyway unless you had help like I'm giving you. Looks like Neptune was wrong in even keeping them away from ships."

"There was one named Pilot Jack," said Bill. "In Sydney harbor. He used to come out and meet every ship and pilot it in through the channel. He was always careful to take deep water, too. He died some time ago and the sailors down around Australia were lost without him."

"Oh, Pilot Jack," said Trigon. "He didn't die. A Royal Guard found him at it and had him sent to the antarctic. He'd been warned time after time. I tell you, we've had lots of trouble with that sort of thing."

"Well, if something happens to me," said Bill, "then what will happen to you? Will you put in an appearance?"

"What else can I do? When they kill you, there I'll be. And even if Oceanus just puts you into the coral quarries, he'll sure as high water shoot me down to the gulf of Tartarus."

"What kind of a place is that?"

"It's way under the earth. Lakes of fire, boiling rock, nauseous gases, cinder storms— *Ugh*, what an awful place! They've got a fifty-headed Hydra down there that attends to the tortures personally. And when she isn't busy with you, you're being mauled around by a Fury—women with serpents in their hair—It makes me sick to think of it."

"Can't you think of some way out?"

"I've had my fun," said Trigon with a sigh.

"But you can't just give up like this."

"All right. We'll start a fight and

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get killed here and now. This Dosga isn't as tough as a Royal Guard officer but he's still tough enough with those soldiers he's got to chop us into bait."

"Which way is the border?" persisted Bill.

"Upcurrent. About a league. But for the sacred sigh of a virgin, my friend, don't get any ideas. While there's this form there's still hope of keeping this form. Let events take their course and question not what the Destines have done with your puppet strings."

"I make my own," said Bill.

"If you try—"

But Trigon was interrupted. "What are you muttering about?" snapped Dosga. "What ungodly language is that?"

"English," said Bill.

"*Bah*, English. I flunked it three semesters running," said Dosga. "What were you muttering about?"

"I was saying my prayers."

"*Humph*. A lot of good that will do you."

"You seem pretty certain," said Bill.

"I'm always certain," snapped Dosga.

Bill began to laugh in an intentionally insulting fashion.

"What's so funny?" demanded Dosga furiously.

"Why," said Bill, managing to swallow his mirth, "to hear you say something like that when it's apparent that a Titan was never so wrong."

"Wrong?" scowled Dosga. "Wrong about what?"

"Why, you're out of your territory."

"Listen, *man*, when I want your advice about navigation I'll ask for it."

"Then you'd better start asking," said Bill, "for I know my oceanography. We're nearly two miles upstream from the border."

"What?"

"That's what I said. But, of course, you'd never admit it."

"Admit it? Two miles upstream—Thundering typhoons! Do you mean to tell me you're so lost that you don't even know where the border is?"

"I know where it is, but you don't," said Bill.

"*I* don't. I, Dosga, don't know where my own border— Why, you turtle-faced troll! You give me the lie—"

"See?" said Bill. "When a Titan is wrong he always begins to bluster to cover up his error. In a minute or two you'll change the course a little and hope I won't notice, and then you'll sneak back over the border—"

"Drowning dogfish!" roared Dosga. "Cast reflections on my navigation, will you? Call me a liar in front of my own men, will you? Talk out of turn and laugh in my face, will you? By the shell of a dead oyster! By the howl of a Hydra! I'll make you eat those lies! *Patrol! Column left! Swim!*"

THE PATROL obediently banked and the sharks above fell into echelon while their vanguard darted madly back and forth into an advance position again.

"Call me a liar," snarled Dosga to himself. "What else could you expect of a tailless, scaleless, witless, finless *man*?"

Overhearing or suspecting, Bill made answer: "Men are a pretty foul race, I'll admit."

"Huh?" said Dosga.

"They are weak and avaricious, selfish and stupid," said Bill.

"Well— Say, you almost got good sense, *man*."

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"There's only one thing which distinguishes man," said Bill. "And, of course, that's a very small thing and doesn't even begin to counteract his evils."

"What's that?" said Dosga.

"Man is pretty alert, considering. His senses are very acute. But he can't swim hardly at all and there aren't half a hundred men that really know how to spear fish and so they're really a pretty poor race."

"Alert?" said Dosga.

"Well—not so very, of course. But a man can see a lot farther than other beings and his sense of smell is very acute, and he can hear pins drop at the range of a mile. That isn't much of an accomplishment, considering all the things a sea being can do—"

"A pin?" said Dosga. "At a mile?" He frowned to think about it. "How far is a mile?"

"One third of a league. Not so very far—"

"Whispering whales," said Dosga. "A third of a league—"

"You can probably do better," said Bill. "Now, for instance, I can see only as far as that knoll over to the right, whereas you can probably see much farther." Bill hoped that the knoll he and Trigon had sat upon *was* over to the right.

Dosga glanced that way and saw nothing, and was much impressed. "Yes. Yes, of course. I can see beyond that." And he swam along silently thereafter, much laden with wonder. In fact, Dosga had completely forgotten why they had changed their course until he saw ahead of them a pile of conchs. The patrol was so busy wondering with Dosga about the remarkable sight and hearing and smelling of a human that it had to be halted by order before the boundary marker.

"There," said Dosga. "You see? I was right. Here is the volcano pattern on our side and the trident on the other. Now, will you take back what you said about my navigation?"

"Certainly," said Bill. "I can see now how much in error I was. I can well understand now why Oceanus had you placed in charge of a patrol in such an important sector."

Dosga was much mollified. "You know, I begin to perceive some good qualities in the nature of *man* after all. But come along. Much as I dislike to do it now I must hail you before the court. *Patrol—*"

"What's that cloud over there?" said Bill.

"Oh, that?" said Dosga, glancing across the border. "Why, that is a tide-rip storm. The Gulf Stream makes a fuss whenever the changing tide runs into it. *Patrol—*"

"No, no," said Bill. "I mean that cloud way on the other side of that."

"On the other side?" said Dosga, unable himself to see any more than the dark swirls a few hundred yards away. "Why, I can't recognize it—as being anything interesting, of course."

The patrol strained their sight in that direction.

"See?" said Bill. "It is moving in this direction very swiftly. Do you think it might be some sort of fish? No, it's too big for that."

The patrol was truly nervous now. The sharks above swam in small, agitated circles, blinking to penetrate the green murk. The soldiers, who had settled their tail tips to the bottom upon arrival at the marker, were now horizontal once more, ready to drive away with a powerful tail thrust in any given direction.

"Too big?" said Dosga.

"Why, yes. You know, I saw a picture in a book one time that

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looked something like that shape. But it couldn't be, of course."

"Picture— Of what?"

"Of a Scylla, of course."

"Wh-what?

"Oh, yes! Yes, *that's what it is!*" cried Bill. "It's a *Scylla!* Headed this way!"

BILL was so buffeted by the currents of threshing tails and so densely surrounded by the sand cloud which arose from the bottom that he could not see what had taken place. For ten seconds he spun around and around, and then he settled prone to the sand, held by the weight of his irons.

The sand began to settle and drift away and, soon, the water was again clear around him. Two lances were lying nearby. A pack was rising and falling as it was carried along. Otherwise there was no sign of the patrol.

Bill began to laugh. And though the laughter, he knew, bordered upon hysteria, it was good to do so.

In a moment, however, he quieted himself down.

"I don't get it," complained Trigon. "If there's a Scylla on his way here, we'd better swim for our lives!"

"In these chains?"

Bill was made to thresh about in an effort to break the confining bands, but they held strongly. He doubted the patrol would come back, but that would not prevent another from picking him up.

A small, scared voice issued from under the pile of conch shells and a pair of frightened eyes peered forth.

"Is it gone?" said Gurk, the pilot fish.

"It was never here," said Bill.

"You mean . . . you mean you lied?" said Gurk. "I think that was very rude of you. I think you are a very rude and boorish sort of person. What if my heart had stopped?"

"It didn't," said Bill. "Give me a hand with these irons."

"Oh, I wouldn't dare," said Gurk.

"I would," rumbled a voice from a nearby depression.

They saw the octopus come slithering out of a hiding place. "If you can't run away, you hide," said the octopus. "And I don't know what you did, but it's easy to see you got rid of that patrol. And it wouldn't be gratitude if I didn't help you after you had saved my life. And gratitude is rare enough."

Bill shuddered to stare into the great, unwinking eyes. The brute stood about five feet tall and even then he was not half erect. And he was what you might call a small octopus.

"Of course," said the octopus, "I am also getting even with the patrol, but that hasn't any effect upon my gratitude. I am also grateful. But that patrol *should* lose its prisoner. Besides, I think I shall move and petition Neptune for citizenship."

While he spoke his tentacles were wrapping themselves about the chains and fin-cuffs, and the steel might as well have been rubber for all the fuss the fellow made about it. The irons fell away.

"Thank you," said Bill.

"Don't thank me," said the octopus. "I did it all from gratitude. Now, as long as you must stand in so well with Neptune—"

"But I don't even know Neptune," said Bill.

"What?" cried the octopus.

"Why, no. You see, I told the patrol that Neptune was king just so the patrol wouldn't kill me right away and so I could plan an escape—"

"You liar!" roared the octopus, threshing about. "You fiend! You dissembler! I'll draw you out into the shape of an eel! I'll crush every

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bone in your filthy body and eat you through a reed! After all I've done for you—"

"Man," said Gurk, "if you don't get away from here, we'll all be dead. That Scylla you saw is almost here now."

"What?" cried Bill, whirling around to look over the border.

He almost fainted away. Less than a hundred yards from them a veritable tower of horror was advancing. There *was* a Scylla!

"That," said Gurk, "makes two lies you've told."

BILL'S MIND was going like a destroyer's propeller. Was the Scylla there because he had said it would be there? Was he himself a figment of his own imagination?

But the Scylla, whatever its source, was certainly a reality now and when Bill could see it in detail he doubted that he could have thought up such a horrible thing if he'd worked for months.

The thing's approach was noisy—and no wonder. For it seemed to be borne by a pack of snarling, howling, barking beasts, all peculiarly adapted to the sea, but still bearing characteristics of the land. And it had no less than six heads, each one more horrible than the last. For company it had several huge water snakes. It was an army in itself.

Gurk was frantically burrowing deeper into the boundary marker. The octopus had gone away from there in a froth of activity. Trigon was assailed by such hopelessness that his voice was a whisper and his strength was naught.

"Even if it doesn't kill us, it will turn us in," said Trigon in a hopeless way.

Bill was struggling to overcome a very real nausea. He knew that he could never swim fast enough to escape this thing. Somehow he got a vise grip on his nerves and made himself stop shaking. He couldn't run and there was almost no hope, but—

Bill lunged ahead, straight at the monster. He waved his arms at the mass and strained his voice and looked urgent.

"Quick!" cried Bill. "You're just in time! What took you so long? Hurry, hurry, hurry!" He did not pause, even when he was directly before the horror. "Can't you ever be on time? They've got a long start on you already!"

"What's got a start?" said the highest head.

Bill racked his wits and then shouted: "The giants! The giants, of course!" For, so far as his remote knowledge of the subject went, the race of giants had also sprung from the Titan line and had disputed the right and power of any in the line of Zeus.

"Giants?" cried all six heads together. "How many?"

"Three of them!"

"You mean Alcyoneus, Pallas and Enceladus?" said the Scylla.

"Who else?"

"But they . . . they haven't been seen for centuries! They are all in Tartarus!" And the highest head scowled, and then the other five faces followed, one after the other.

"Of course they were!" said Bill. "But where have you been that you didn't hear of their escape? Quick! Don't stand there gawping! Have you no wits at all?"

"Yes—but—" began the highest head, above the din of the beasts.

"This thing is a *man!*" said another head.

"There's no doubt about his being a *man!*" roared a third.

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"*Man* must be killed!" howled the other three.

"So I'm a *man,* am I?" bellowed Bill. "I might have known you would be frightened. Alcyoneus said you would be when I threatened to send for you. No wonder you took so long to answer my summons!"

"What summons?" asked the highest head.

"Back out of it!" cried Bill. "Pallas said you would. Pallas said that you were weak as a minnow and as frightened as a fink! And now I believe him."

"He lies!" roared all heads together.

"Maybe he does," said Bill. "But still, here you stand arguing when they're running away! Can't you even understand the most simple principles of Military Magic? Of course I look like a *man.* Should I look like a Triton and have them kill me? Hurry, you idiots. Or Enceladus was right when he said you were all bellow and no batter. Why, if a giant had said that *my* father couldn't see his flukes for his belly and that *I* had been begotten by his marriage with a slug, *I* wouldn't be standing here arguing!"

The six heads snarled angrily among themselves, and then one raised up and cried: "Swim Five. Stand guard on this being until he can prove what he is to our satisfaction. Now, you, which way did these giants go?"

Bill pointed vaguely into the southwest, along the border. "If you cut across fast enough you can keep them from reaching Oceanus."

Scylla, roughened and in an ugly frame of collective minds, went charging off down the border. Bill watched it go with a deep sigh of relief for, quite aside from the terror of being near it, the constant racket it produced had nearly deafened him.

He had forgotten the order to Swim Five until it came swirling down around him and took guard positions.

It seemed to Bill that there was nothing in the landscape then but grinning rows of hungry teeth. The six sharks, however, had none among them longer than twelve feet and they appeared to have eaten within the past day, for one wingfish looked half asleep.

"You may as well sit down," said the swim leader in a rumbling voice. "If you aren't all you say you are and if you aren't here when that Scylla comes back, we wouldn't last very long."

"Do you mean," said Bill, fighting down this shock upon shock, "that you would disobey an order from a Triton?"

"No, but we haven't any idea that you *are* a Triton. Especially since I remember that all Tritons were supposed to attend a banquet tonight at the royal palace and wouldn't be out here anyway. I guess that Scylla didn't think of that, or you wouldn't be alive now."

"*But I am a Triton!*" roared a voice within Bill. "By the sacred slivers in a saintly snapper's tail! I've taken enough! Enough, I tell you! I am Trigon! And, by the howl of a halibut, Mordon, if you don't close your teeth and bang your chin on the white sand floor I'll tear off your flippers one by one and make you into a tunic!"

The swim leader blinked rapidly and then, thinking better of it, closed his teeth and beat his jaw upon the white sand floor. "If you are indeed Trigon—"

"*What?*" roared the Triton. "You give me the lie? I'll tie knots in your

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children and spit on your wife! I'll stuff your tail into your mouth and roll you on knives! Bow down, you moss-covered alibi for a minnow!"

The swim leader pounded his jaw once more, and by now the whole guard was doing likewise.

"I am merely Mordon, master of the Gulf Stream sharks until my demotion. I pray to you, Trigon, have pity upon me and bring no more evil to my cavern. A spy in my own bodyguard told Neptune that I had provided escort for your escape, and so I have come so low as to lead but five small sharks. I would have died had not Nereus himself interposed on my behalf. If you cause me to desert my post as your guard and remove yourself, I shall be fed to that filthy Scylla alive. Have pity, Trigon, my brave one."

"Pity is the pitfall of a fool!" cried Trigon. "I'd never have been caught if your miserable escort had not wailed. Don't come simpering to me for mercy. You'll swim bodyguard for me to the shore or you'll suffer a fate much worse than being fed to a mere Scylla!"

Mordon shivered from nose to tail. He sought to shift the subject. "How is it that you come here in the worthless form of a *man?*"

"Let that be as it may be," said Trigon. *"Lead onward!"*

"Wait a minute," said Bill, in a voice so low that the sharks could not hear. "You know very well what waits for me on shore. You're not going to take me back there."

"I suppose you'd rather perish out here!" said Trigon.

"I don't want to perish anywhere. I'm sure if I put my plea to Neptune he'll free me."

"And what will he do to *me?*" cried Trigon.

"You can't go flopping around on the shore," said Bill. "You'd better stay here and take your medicine."

"I'd rather be scarified with an oyster shell!" swore Trigon.

"And I'd rather be fried in oil than return to shore," said Bill.

Mordon had already led on but now, seeing that Trigon's evident form did not follow, turned back in a bank to see what was wrong.

"Then you'll have to be fried!" said Trigon. "For that would be very peaceful compared to what Neptune would do to you for harboring me." And he started to swim toward the faraway shore.

Bill had one last trick and he played it now. He had no idea that he could make it work, but he had to try.

He snapped his fingers.

It was not a very loud snap, for the water tended to make his thumb slippery.

Trigon took two more fluke flips and then stopped.

"You are asleep," said Bill in a flood of relief. "You are asleep and you can only do what I tell you to do. My mind reactions will be in your body also."

Mordon banked. "What's wrong?"

"I have changed my mind," said Bill in Trigon's best roar. "I have changed my mind, and now I wish to go as fast as possible to the palace of my great-grandfather, Neptune."

"But"—gasped Mordon—"but he will kill you!"

"I'm getting braver," said Bill.

"Hades help us," moaned Mordon. *"Echelon! Left bank! Swim!"*

Bill did not feel at all sure that he was doing right. Perhaps he was getting overly bold, now that he had vanquished the patrol and the Scylla. But if the six-headed Scylla had not been able to make six heads

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think faster than one— Well, he'd always wanted to see Neptune anyway.

## V.

GURK, the pilot fish, had swung in alongside the navigator of Swim Five, for Gurk doubted the wisdom of returning to his own patrol headquarters just then and, as pilot fish were noncombatants, there was nothing wrong with his consorting with the enemy—providing the Titans did not find out about it. Besides, there was much gossip to be exchanged and, in addition, if he saw this bewildering mystery through, he would have talking material for months to come. Gurk had heard of Trigon, as who in the deep had not?. And to find Trigon somehow involved with a *man*—

During the night, during one of the hourly rest periods required of patrols by regulations on long voyages—for it would not do to have them weary when an emergency arose along the swim—Gurk came up close to Bill's ear and held himself there with small flirts of his tail, not much more than two bright eyes in the dark.

"You could swim for it," whispered Gurk. "I'm not in any such good position myself. I can't go home and I can't enlist with Neptune without having an eye kept on me as a possible spy and, besides, I don't know too much about this side of the border. But I know a place where you could hide out. A girl by the name of Circe runs it. And though you never get much to eat there but pork, she'd be tickled to take you in. Of course she's kind of crazy, because she doesn't mind having men around, but safety, after all, is what we need the most. You couldn't get there without a pilot."

"I'm going to go to Neptune," said Bill.

"Humph," said Gurk. "Tritons never were noted for their sense. The least he'll do to you is have you sent to Tartarus, and if you want to go through *that*—"

"How come you're so sure of that?" said Bill.

"Why, even on the other side we've been getting circulars. Neptune wants you dead or alive, Trigon."

A sleepy rumble came out of Bill: "Did somebody call my name?"

"That's the trouble with you," said Gurk. "You play tricks on people and you're rude. Of course I called your name—"

"Say! By the nine tails of the royal catfish!" said Trigon. "Where am I?"

"About five hours from Neptune's palace," said Gurk. "But you know that."

"Five— Leaping lobsters! Have I gone crazy? Why, they'll extract my bones one by one and they'll part my helmet with an ax! Come on! We're getting out of here!"

"Now you're talking," said Gurk.

"What's the row?" thundered Mordon.

"Quiet!" said Bill.

"Quiet be shivered! What's the idea, leading me into this?"

Mordon came back to them. "What are you yelling about?"

"Nothing," said Bill.

"Is that you, Mordon?" said Trigon. "What the tearing typhoons do you mean letting me run into a trap? Demoted, were you? Why, you putrefied sardine, I'll demote you to a fishbone in a herring's throat! Take me to my own execution, will you—"

Mordon couldn't see well enough to dodge the blow and Bill wasn't strong enough to prevent it. The



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ex-master of Gulf Stream sharks caved in amidships and wailed with pain.

Bill was striving to co-ordinate himself, and Pluto only knew what would have happened next if he had not been able to snap his fingers.

Even though the sound of it was very dim, there was an abrupt cessation of activity within him, a yawn and then silence. It had worked a second time, but it had almost brought disaster.

"We'd better be going now," said Bill.

"O-o-o-o-ooh, my stomach!" said Mordon. "Why did you do such a thing to me. You know my digestion has been bad ever since I ate that doctor who had his pockets full of pills!"

Bill thought he had better play it out. "You weren't very respectful. You didn't say 'sir.'"

"But you keep changing voices all the time. One minute," complained Mordon, "you sound just like Trigon, and the next you sound like a *man!*"

"That's because of Military Magic," said Bill. "You wouldn't be able to understand it."

"Yes," said Mordon doubtfully. "Yes. But I had an idea awhile ago that maybe you weren't Trigon at all but just what you look like, a *man*. Maybe you are a spy or—"

"We'd better be going," said Bill.

"A spy or a Titan," said Mordon.

"Or crazy," said Gurk.

"That's it. You're Trigon, but you're crazy."

"No, no," said Bill, swiftly.

"But you are going straight to your death in Neptune's palace," said Gurk.

"If so, let's go," said Bill.

"Now I *know* he's crazy," said Mordon. *"Patrol! Swim!"*

They streaked away, their great bodies outlined in phosphorus which left great yellow wakes behind each one.

Bill himself was beginning to doubt his own wisdom, but then a man doubts everything in the hour before dawn, right or wrong. It was certain that he was not going to spend the rest of his life consorting with fish and monsters, just as it was certain that he would never be free if he again set foot on land. And that meant he could never see Ginger again.

He had often heard about throwing things into the laps of the gods. He would throw his fate there now. And even if it meant Tartarus, that was almost better than being in doubt. It was suicidal and fatalistic, and he was probably being a damned fool, but here he went.

WHEN the depths were alight they had entered a wide valley somewhat deeper than the surrounding region and a great deal more populous. And now they were coming to the valley's center.

Tall, carefully trimmed plumes waved gracefully and slowly on the polished sand floor as though nodding loftily to one another. Fish passed by in orderly schools, the leaders dipping greeting to other leaders as they passed. But what was most astonishing about it was the attitude of the smaller fish toward the larger. An angel fish with a devilishly hungry eye flapped his fins quite calmly above a school of edible skipjacks. And the skipjacks did not even try to get away from either the angel fish or a toothy barracuda who went streaking by.

A whole school of small fish went sailing within five feet of a lumbering octopus and did not so much as dodge.

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Finally Bill found the reason. Engraved on a rock was the sign:

Royal Park
NO HUNTING
NO PICNICKING
NO DUELING
By order of
NEPTUNE
REX

He was somewhat astonished at being able to read the sign, for it did not appear at all familiar, and he wondered again at the changes that had come over him. How he breathed and stayed on the bottom and talked with fish were all mysteries, for he didn't seem able to reach into Trigon's mind for any information. He wondered, if he got out of this, whether or not he'd always be able to pull such tricks.

In the far distance he saw an object which grew steadily clearer as they approached. Bill had expected a palace of some sort but nothing like this.

It seemed to be a massive bundle of towers which rose limitlessly. The building was all out of proportion, being so narrow and so tall, for there was plenty of building ground. The lower turrets ended in small, conical roofs which gleamed as though of silver. The walls were of luminescent coral, decorated by laboriously carved friezes. Before it the seascape was beautifully parked and arranged, done to promote casualness rather than formality.

Three ancient vessels graced the scene, nothing more than skeletons of frames and ribs, but still glowing with bits of golden carving put upon them centuries before, when ships were pretty instead of fast.

With Gurk, the Swim of sharks withdrew to a higher level, leaving Bill to stream along close to the bottom.

"What's the idea?" said Bill.

"We want no responsibility in this," said Mordon. "You've still got brothers, Trigon, and so we can neither escort you because of Neptune nor hand you over because of your kin. It's all up to you now."

Bill had grown so accustomed to their great bodies torpedoing along upon his left and right that he felt very lonely. And he was beginning to be scared. Was he doing right in coming here? Wouldn't Neptune's reaction be as Gurk and Mordon had said?

He had approached the foremost wreck now, but he was so full of agitation and indecision that he almost missed seeing the sign posted there:

Drowned Sailors
Report to
Personnel Officer
By Order of
NEPTUNE
REX

There was an arrow leading off, away from the main palace and toward another structure of less pretentious proportions. Bill did not follow it, of course, and started on toward the palace itself.

A trident sharply pricked his side and he half rolled to find its source.

A sentry was standing there, evidently an officer of some sort. His big-fluked tail was bobbing on the sand and his beard was flowing back over his shoulder in the current. He had the trident insignia on his helmet and his rank upon his shoulder. He did not look very pleased.

"You sailors!" said the guard. "Can't you read? Now get over there to the personnel office and be quick about it. You'll find Lord Nelson and John Paul Jones on the admission board today and there's no use

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trying to sneak by and get to Neptune. You're not *that* important."

"But I'm not a drowned sailor," said Bill.

"Yeah? Then why did that patrol of sharks bring you in? Next I suppose you'll be telling me they didn't eat you first. Get along!"

"I'm a *man*," said Bill, "and I must have an audience with Neptune. I come of my own volition—"

"You mean you're not dead?" said the guard, pinching Bill's arm to see if it left a mark. It didn't. "By the pen of the royal polywog! *Not dead*. Oh, this is bad. Very bad. Wait a minute. Don't go swimming off. Article Thirty-two—"

"Says that a *man* must be killed," said Bill. "I've been through all that twice. I must see Neptune."

"You've done something," said the guard. *"Here!"*

But Bill wasn't waiting. He took a desperate chance and eluded the trident's three sharp prongs and raced for the palace with all the power he could summon.

The guard was too astonished at such audacity to get into instantaneous pursuit and that small difference of taking off was enough to give Bill all the lead he needed.

With the guard driving wildly right behind him, Bill flashed through the main gate and straight at the door.

But here he was doomed. Two sentries there, having seen the trouble, were open-armed for him. They scraped him with their scales as they enveloped him.

A Triton came flashing from a side office. "What's this? What's this? Drowned sailors—"

"I'm not a drowned sailor!" said Bill. "I'm still alive! I've urgent business with Neptune—"

"Violating a royal order!" said the Triton. "Have him brought into the execution chamber and we'll make him dead enough."

THEY bore Bill toward a side door and started down a curving passage. They were deaf to what Bill tried to tell them.

"What a pass things have come to!" said the Triton. "No respect anywhere any more. You'd think *man* owned this place! Get a sword, Farka. Here, lay him out on this table. Wait until I see the leader of that Shark Swim. Why didn't they kill him before they brought him in? Doesn't a person ever get a chance to eat just one breakfast in peace?"

A small, frightened voice from the upper part of the dungeon cut into the diatribe. "Worthy soldiers! Oh, worthy soldiers! Don't do it!"

The Triton glanced angrily up toward the pilot fish, Gurk. "Who are you and how did you come here? Go back to your swim before I eat *you* for my breakfast."

"Eat me," said Gurk. "For I am just a poor, weak pilot fish. But I must tell you that that *man* is not a *man* at all but Trigon himself!"

"What?" gasped the Triton, staring at Bill. "But how— Why, there's nothing in Advanced Military Magic to warrant a Triton looking like a *man!* Pilot fish, if you are lying to me—"

"I am not. I have heard him speak. He is Trigon! And because I have kept you from committing a sin of killing one of your brothers, I shall expect proper employment with Neptune's Royal Guards—"

"Are you Trigon?" bawled the Triton, shaking Bill.

"Oh! Did somebody call me?" said Trigon. "Where am I? What has happened?" And then in horror: "Tilfog? You here? Oh, my sainted past! Oh, my tattered flippers! I'm in Neptune's palace! You *man!* Til-

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*"I'll take off those fin-cuffs," said the octopus annoyedly. "but then get out. I want some peace."*

fog, here is the villain, this *man!* Tilfog, you can't execute me out of hand—without trial— Remember when I used to bring you butter-fish?"

"Trigon," said Tilfog in a hard voice. "So the brass goldpiece comes back!"

Bill's plans went tumbling. He had meant to bargain with Neptune for his own life and Trigon's. Had meant to fast-talk the monarch out of vengeance—

"Take me to Neptune!" cried Bill.

"Take him to Tartarus!" roared Trigon. "He did this thing to me. He caused that border incident. He caused everything. He threw a spell on me and then stole me so that he would be strong. And now that I have come back, repentant, bringing the true criminal—"

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"Trigon, my brother," said Tilfog. "Can this be true?"

"True as a trident! Take me to Neptune!"

"It will be done," said Tilfog.

THE SENTRIES lifted Bill off the table and scooted him back up the passageway to the first floor. And then, rapidly, they soared up through the palace. There was no stairway anywhere, but only tunnels through which shot pages with spangled fins and urgent expressions, and where dawdled fish-at-arms. Light of a greenish hue streamed into the oblong slots in the towers and through the translucency of the floors. As they ascended, the place grew lighter.

Bill had some trouble trying to adjust the difference of pressure, but as he was "breathing" water and as water contains no nitrogen, bubbles did not form in his blood and the discomfort was temporary.

At last they came into a room where the light was nearly blinding. Bill's impression of the place was that he had somehow become reduced in size to a goldfish and had been led into a tank. The surface of the sea was less than thirty feet above and it formed a brilliant ceiling to the room, playing intricate shadow patterns upon the floor. He knew now why the palace was so tall. And it was even taller than this, for it seemed, from the vague shadows above the surface, that it must continue into an island of some sort.

He had a hurried glimpse of the things which were around the walls and then he was momentarily blinded by the glitter of the personage who sat upon the throne.

Neptune was in morning audience and before him many beings were disposed, some guarded and some guarding, some judged and some judging, some arguing and some crying and all very humble except the half dozen Tritons. Neptune's trident was of gold, studded with great pearls. His crown, too, was of gold and pearls. The upper half of his body was naked except for a gleaming order upon his breast, and the lower half was carelessly swathed by a silvery robe from which protruded his naked feet—for, unlike his subjects, he had no flukes but legs instead. The throne was made in the form of—or was—a gigantic oyster shell from which the light was thrown back in half a hundred colors. Neptune paid no attention to the new entrants for he was slowly stroking his beard as he listened to the evidence against a dolphin. His old eyes were deep with wisdom, but his body was strong and youthful.

Seeing he was not immediately to be hailed up, Bill relaxed a bit and tried to collect his wits after the giddy ascent. He eyed the Tritons who leaned so indolently upon their spears and found that the Tritons were eying something else in the room. Bill's gaze wandered and was shocked into fixity upon the rest of the court. About thirty nymphs were sitting sorrowfully in groups along a wall, talking in whispers when they talked at all, each one looking bleaker than the next. But they were ennobled by their sorrow and, being wonderously beautiful in any case, the effect was heart-stopping.

Their silvery tails were curved like strains of music; their gold hair flowed down sweetly to their waists; their downcast eyes were more lovely than any jewels.

Bill drew a long sigh and then, hastily, remembered that Ginger was much more fascinating than any of these. Vigorously he turned his attention to the throne.

Neptune had passed judgment upon the dolphin, who was led away

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weeping. The next case was a harpy who was accused of fomenting revolt in the Indian Ocean but who, being hungry, could not take her eyes away from the plate of fresh game fish which graced the steps as tribute from some far-flung kingdom. Her claws twitched and her wings clattered and her revoltingly beautiful face was pale. Finally Neptune had the platter removed and she again showed interest in her fate. That is, until she happened to see Bill, when she became aware of her hunger anew. This distraction brought Neptune's attention to Bill.

Gone in that instant was that careful, judicial look. Neptune's face was overspread with amazement and currents began to run out from him as though a storm was abrew.

"What's this?" bellowed Neptune. "A *man, here?*"

"Yes, your majesty," said Tilfog. "A *man* and Trigon."

At the sound of that name all heads jerked to attention and all eyes began to search for Trigon. Bill was compelled forward until he stood before the throne. The royal scribe looked up from his tablet and stuck his scratching tool in his teeth and blinked fishily. Amphitrite herself, hearing the commotion, came out from a shadowed place behind her husband and studied the captive thoughtfully.

Bill felt more than ever like a goldfish.

"Great-grandfather!" cried Trigon. "Spare me from this magician! I have brought him back to you—"

"He's lying!" cried Bill. "I brought *him* back!"

"What's this?" gaped Neptune. "First the voice of Trigon and then the voice of a *man?* Somebody! Bring Nereus here!"

"I plead with you, great-grandfather!" cried Trigon. "Release me from this captivity! This mortal caused all my trouble! He has taken me to far lands! By his sorcery he was able to make me infuriate the Titans and then escape from you. By his sorcery he was able to use my strength against his own people! Release me!"

Nereus paddled in, tripping upon his long beard as he tried to seat himself on the steps. He was a benign old fellow, blinking thoughtfully, a half smile habitual upon his lips as though he absently tried to pacify things before anyone even began to be angry. As a lover of truth and justice and as a wonder at prophecy, he occupied a high place in Neptune's esteem both as a father-in-law and as an adviser.

"What's this? Do I hear Trigon's voice coming from that man?" said Nereus.

"That you do!" cried Trigon. "I have been imprisoned and abased. By the wisdom of your eyes, my great-great-grandfather, I know I shall have justice at your hands. This mortal caused all my trouble by his magic. He made me do outseaish things and caused my downfall. But I have brought him back! By your revered beard, I demand justice."

"This is very strange," said Nereus. "Very strange and very difficult."

"It's not difficult at all," said Neptune. "Guard, cut open that *man* and let Trigon out."

"No!" howled Bill. "You can't do that! If you cut me ever so little you'll also cut Trigon. I'll save you the trouble. Trigon, by all the curses you've cursed, come out before we're both shark meat."

Bill felt uncomfortable immediately. He felt expanded and distorted and mauled from within. And then

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his jaws were distended until he was blinded and his tongue was again relieved of its skin. When he had come around, Trigon was standing before him shaking himself into some kind of order.

TRIGON seemed to be expanding in size and gathering body. And then, at last, he stood to his true height. He was a very brutal-looking Triton in many ways, for his muscles were like loaves. But in other ways he was extremely handsome, for the usual fish face of the Triton was not his. Instead, he was the perfect physiognomical image of Neptune. Of course, the lower part of his body was scaled, but the scales were brave and bright. And there were no scales whatever upon his chest. He was unshaven, but it could be seen that this was not his custom.

A little sigh ran through the hall, mostly from the quarter of the nymphs. Amphitrite beamed. Nereus nodded in thoughtful approval of his great-great-grandson.

"Now reek your vengeance upon this thrice-bedeviled *man!*" said Trigon. "For I have brought him back for your justice."

Bill could see then that Trigon was much wiser than most Tritons and, furthermore, that he was the spoiled child of the royal family.

"Then you didn't do those things on purpose?" said Nereus.

"How could I do anything else with this sorcerer making me do all the things I did? Why, by the nightmares of a whale, if I had my way I'd run him through with a sharp piece of coral and dig out his eyes with a clam shell and break all his bones with a squid."

"Is this true?" said Nereus, looking at Bill.

"No!" cried Bill. "This—"

"Of course you'd say that," said Nereus. "Naturally, you'd say that." He looked up at Neptune. "He's guilty, my son."

Neptune nodded. "Guilty. Tilfog, you and some of the men take this *man* out and have him properly and slowly executed. And now, Trigon, my boy, come up here and kiss your mother and know that you are forgiven. Why, the nymphs have pined nigh away for a sight of you, and how dull this old court has been without your wit and your escapades. Come, my boy."

"Wait!" wailed Bill. "You can't do this to me!"

"Begone with him," said Neptune. "Now, Trigon, tell us all about it."

"Well," said Trigon, "there isn't so much to tell. I was swimming along one day at the head of my patrol and this *man,* wholly invisible, came up to me—"

Bill was fighting Tilfog with all his might, and Tilfog was hanging on hard. Other Tritons, interested in anything which even slightly resembled a battle, swooped toward them.

Managing to get loose a little from Tilfog, Bill stepped back. He was getting used to the drag of water now and so his timing was right. He slammed a right into Tilfog's solar plexus and followed it with a left into Tilfog's jaw.

Tilfog grunted and drifted down to the floor.

The other Tritons arrived in an angry swirl, spears upraised. Bill, like a good fencer, ducked the spears of the first two and applied a little jujitsu. One Triton went bowling end over end down the hall. The other yelped and sat down to nurse a badly sprained elbow.

A spear came within an inch of Bill's dodging head and then the spear described a short arc and the Triton on the other end got the flat of the prongs so hard on his helmet

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that the visor jammed down on his mouth and the edge covered his eyes; yelling, he bobbed away, prying at his casque.

Bill was assaulted by yet another, but this one, seeing the fate of the man who had tried a spear, sought to get his arms around Bill and so squash him. But Bill spun halfway around, brought a knee into the Triton's stomach and then, sending the edge of his palm into the back of the Triton's neck, paralyzed his man for the moment and sent him reeling from the fight.

In astonishment the guards saw the remnants of the Tritons present either out or wishing they were. It was clearly time to do something in the way of a military maneuver but just what the sergeant could not instantly decide. In another instant they would bear down upon him and force him to surrender by sheer weight.

But Bill wasn't waiting. His head was cleared by the combat. Bill howled: "Beware! Stand back before I blast this castle from under you! Trigon has told the truth! He has told you I am a sorcerer. And so I am! Stand back, stand back, or I'll eat you one by one!"

Bill leaped forward to the foot of Neptune's throne and Nereus hastily scrambled back from him. Trigon was now on the verge of joining combat and Trigon was a little tougher than anybody there except Neptune himself.

"Neptune, your majesty!" cried Bill. "I know your justice! You have done ill! And in reward for that I shall show you the fate I shall deal to all of you! You see Trigon there, leering at me and about to battle with me. I shall show you how easy it is for me to overpower you all!"

Trigon laughed and, grabbing his great-grandfather's trident, prepared a lunge which, from that height, would most certainly be fatal to Bill. Trigon lunged!

And Bill snapped his fingers!

THE DIVE was carried out but not with any driving flukes. The spear went very wide and Trigon let go his hold upon it. Bill caught Trigon by the chin and spun him around, stopping him.

"Stand still," said Bill. "I am your master. You cannot move. You are as rigid as this spear!"

Trigon went as rigid as the trident. Bill reached out and placed his hand on the belt of the slightly buoyant Trigon and then, with the Triton wholly unbending, carried him as a waiter might carry a tray.

"He's dead!" screamed the nymphs all together.

"Dead," nodded Bill, "unless I care to again give him life. See how stiff he is! Stiff as any corpse! Behold my magic!"

Evidently nobody was able to do anything else, for not a sound came from anyone.

"To accomplish this I had only to snap my fingers." And he held his hand aloft. "I could just as well snap them and banish you all into such a state as this and leave you for the sea slugs to find and devour! I have only to snap my fingers to place you all in a state which is like death but which is not death. Immortal or not, you shall be caught! No Elysian Fields, no Tartarus, no second life of any kind! In one moment I shall consign you all to this corpselike state and depart laughing at Neptune's justice! Behold my magic!"

"My boy," sobbed Trigon's nymph-mother.

"My grandson," wept Amphitrite.

"You don't dare do this!" roared Neptune. "Guards! Guards!"

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But not a soldier moved, for all minds were full of the fate of the most valiant of all—Trigon!

"Not even a shark to save us!" cried Nereus.

"I shall put a spell upon you!" thundered Neptune.

"Make one motion in the air and the deed is done!" cried Bill. And he again held his fingers, ready to snap them.

"You are a magician!" shouted Neptune.

"More than that!" shouted Bill. "I am thunder and lightning itself and I spit upon the puny power of mere gods! Think of Amphitrite there, stiff and helpless, prey to any revengeful Titan who might come along after the disintegration of your empire. Think of Nereus with worms eating away his face! Think of your sons and daughters covered with moss and barnacles and rotting chunk by chunk! Behold my magic!"

"Wh-what do you want?" said Neptune. "Surely you came here for a purpose."

"Ah, now I see that you *do* have wisdom," said Bill, trying to look crafty. "Of course I came here for something. I came for a passage through your realm and an escort back to my own."

"And . . . and is that all?" said Neptune suspiciously. "You do not want any nymphs?"

"No nymphs," said Bill. "Only money. I want more money than a hundred sharks could transport and all in modern coinage."

"And if you get these things, you will bring Trigon back to life?"

"Give me the safe-conduct and your oath first."

"It is given. All here witness it. The oath of Neptune is never broken, even to a *man*. And your safe-conduct shall be this ring upon my finger." He took it off and threw it to Bill.

Bill tried it on and found it rather large. He admired the carved pearl for a moment and then nodded his thanks.

"Trigon!" said Bill. "Come out of it!"

Trigon came out of it. He grew limp and then staggered to regain his balance. Finally he blinked at Bill. "You again?" And he would have attacked instantly had not Bill held out the ring before his gaze. Trigon blinked at it.

"Your great-grandfather saved you from death at my hands," said Bill. "A death worse than any you might otherwise receive, for it has no second life. Now stand back and take your orders from your people."

Trigon saw how impressed everyone around him was and believed, a little, that he had been retrieved from death. Trigon, all along, had had a growing respect for Bill—for there were too many foggy spots in Trigon's memory which could not be attributed to anyone but Bill.

Bill bowed to them all. He did not seem dangerous now and so, cautiously, the Tritons came around to make his acquaintance in a less bombastic style, wondering a little if he would show them how to fight that way.

Neptune, later, drew Bill aside. "You know, there's nothing in our Military Magic to compare with that stunt of yours. A ship sank a week or two ago I'm told, and though we seldom bother with the cargo, we could get all her gold for you in addition to the few million you asked for."

"Sorry," said Bill.

"A couple of nymphs, too?" said Neptune.

"No, indeed!" said Bill hastily.

"Ah, well, said Neptune, stroking

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his beard, "if you ever need any help let me know. I need a powerful fellow like you. After all, two such powerful fellows as we should not stand apart."

"Any time you want a hand," said Bill, "just ask Gurk the pilot fish to scout me out, for he'll know where to find me. And now, if you could give me my escort—"

"So soon?" cried Neptune. "But I have ordered a banquet of the very best fresh fish—"

"Some other time," said Bill.

## VI.

COTTER RECEIVED a phone call one afternoon and, without saying anything about where he was going but seeming very pleased about answering the summons, left us.

We had been discussing the whereabouts of Bill Greyson and we had not made any more headway on this day than we had on others. The State police chief, the State medical examiner, two new psychiatrists who had been called in and a senator—who wondered if he couldn't get some publicity for helping in this mad search for a madman—were all in the main office with me.

The State police chief shook his head glumly. "It's all right for Cotter to run off this way. It seems to be out of his hands. But think of me! Here we have a maniac somewhere in the countryside and half the State watching for him to turn up, and we draw nothing but a string of blanks. I tell you, gentlemen, we've got to get this Greyson back before we have a panic!"

"He probably expired somewhere in some swamp," said the State medical examiner hopefully.

"Strange case, a strange case," said one of the new psychiatrists. "But why and how did he get away?"

"We've been told all that," said the other psychiatrist.

"Gentlemen," said the senator, "our public duty demands that we do something besides sit here and wonder about it. We should at least show activity."

"You show it," said the State police chief. "I'm worn out. If I get one more call from some hysterical constable saying he has just seen Greyson, I'll be ready to be turned into Balm Springs myself!"

"Yes," I said, "when a fellow gets as tired as you are, he begins to think he'll see things any moment."

There was a footstep in the hall and then the door swung in. I glanced up indifferently, thinking I'd see a newspaper reporter such as had been flocking around for days. But no, there was something finer about this fellow.

He was tall and blond and he was dressed in a nicely fitting suit of tropical worsted. His Panama sat on the back of his head and he swung a cane negligently.

And then I recognized him!

It was Bill Greyson!

The others did not recognize him at all and, somehow, for some strange reason, I wanted Bill to get out before they knew him. But Bill spoiled all that.

"May I introduce myself, gentlemen. I'm Greyson."

"Your brother is still on the loose," said the State police chief, hardly glancing around.

"I wonder at it. Business men shouldn't be," said Bill. "But if you look very closely I think you'll know me. I'm *Bill* Greyson, escaped lunatic."

If he had thrown a grenade into that group, he could not have scattered them faster. The State police chief sprang backward, knocking over a chair and drawing his gun.

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The senator dived under the desk so fast that he almost took it with him.

"Now, now, that's a good boy," said the State medical examiner. "Now just be calm."

"Be calm," echoed the psychiatrists.

"Oh, I'm all right," said Bill. And, indeed, he looked very much all right.

"Call in some reporters," said Bill. "I have something to tell them."

"For the lovva Mike," whispered the medical examiner, "get a strait jacket and fifty guards."

But I didn't, for I knew that if Bill should take it into his head to go free, go free he would, guns or guards notwithstanding. The State police chief was very careless with his gun; it wavered over in my direction twice and seemed on the verge of going off at any moment. I hastily grabbed the phone and called the local hotel.

We passed a jumpy half hour waiting for the reporters to show up. No one wanted to make a move toward Bill, feeling that as long as he stayed calm, he would be right there and we could lock him up when we wanted. At least, we tried to convey that feeling.

The reporters came in a swarm and jammed the office. But they stayed a respectful distance away from Bill. He smiled half apologetically at them.

"I hear," said Bill, "that I have been causing a little fuss around the countryside."

The reporters blinked and wrote it down.

"And I have a story to tell," said Bill. "I want to tell you how it is that a man might go insane for a moment or two and then get sane all over again."

"While he's talking," whispered the police chief, "I'll edge around behind him so I can shoot if he goes wild again."

"I'll get a cell ready for him," said one of the new psychiatrists, drifting off.

"Gentlemen," said Bill, "I made a great discovery. I discovered the secret of mass hypnotism."

"I'll slip out," whispered the other psychiatrist, "and bar the front door. We've got him now. He appears to have lost all that strength."

"And it is well known," said Bill, "that when a man makes a sweeping discovery it comes upon him so suddenly and forcefully that he is apt to be temporarily unbalanced. That was the way it happened to me. Now I am willing to spend a few days under supervision and then be discharged."

"Let him think he will be," whispered the State medical examiner, "and then keep him there!"

"Mass hypnotism?" said a reporter. "Just what is that?"

"Why, it is the ability," said Bill, "of making people believe they see the same thing when that thing is not even taking place. By mass hypnotism I could make a whole crowd believe, all in an instant, that it sees me do something which I have not even started to do."

"Yeah?" said some reporter farther back. "How about bursting out of that padded cell?"

"Why, I hypnotized everybody into believing that door was locked when it wasn't and then into thinking I escaped when I didn't and so, after everything had quieted down, I walked out. I was tired of the place."

"How about asking for fish?" said another reporter.

"How about going through that wall that way?" said a third.

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"All mass hypnotism," said Bill with a disarming grin.

"Yeah? Well, if you're so good, make us believe something."

There was immediate protest, especially from the senator. But Bill did not make any violent moves. He stood up and walked to the desk. "Now, gentlemen, you all know that it is quite impossible for a man to march through a solid object."

"Sure," they chorused.

"And yet," said Bill, "I can make you all believe that I can do so. That's mass hypnotism."

"Yeah?" jeered somebody. "Let's see it!"

Bill shrugged. He turned and stood for a moment muttering something under his breath. Then he made a quick motion with his hand. Very easily he walked straight *through* the desk!

The reporters were stunned and demanded to see it again. Bill did it again.

"You see," said Bill. "You are all hypnotized."

"Nuts," said a reporter.

"All right," said Bill. "I'll make you believe that I can vanish at will."

"Yeah?" said several, but not so heartily now.

Bill's lips moved for an instant and then from toe to crown, as though somebody was pulling a shade over him, he vanished.

"You can't see me," said Bill. "You are all hypnotized!"

"Yug!" croaked somebody.

"There. You can feel me touch you— Beg pardon, officer, but I'd like to have that gun—"

"No!" cried the State police chief. "*No!*"

But empty air devoured the gun.

Then, from toe to crown again, as though a shade was being raised, Bill appeared.

"Merely mass hypnotism," said Bill. "When I discovered it I went crazy—"

"And I'm crazy, too!" yelped the State police chief. And he sprang upon Bill and got the gun away from him, carrying Bill to the floor. Others piled in and Bill, in a moment, was helpless.

He had not been expecting such an attack and it came as a thunderbolt. It pained him. But he offered no resistance. Somebody rustled up a strait jacket and somebody else opened the door to the cells and—

"O. K.," said Bill. "I guess I know when I'm licked. Lead on."

And he was taken below and stored very carefully.

THE REPORTERS began to realize they had a story they could not write without appearing crazy themselves and they decided immediately that they would merely announce that Bill Greyson had been safely found. For who would write such a yarn under the date line of Balm Springs?

They went away. The police chief went away. The senator and the medical examiner went away. And then just the two new psychiatrists were left and they found business elsewhere in the building.

I sat at the desk, wondering about what I had seen and, somehow, feeling sorry for Bill and Ginger. I had been there about half an hour when I received some more callers.

Cotter and Ginger walked in. And, seeing the plight poor Bill was in again, Ginger looked strangely cheerful.

"You locked him up?" said Cotter. "Splendid, splendid."

"And he wasn't hurt?" said Ginger. "That's good."

"What the devil are you grinning about?" I demanded.

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"Why," said Dr. Cotter, "I suppose you'll grin, too, when you hear the news." He smiled complacently. "I am leaving."

"You?" I gaped. "Leaving? But the bills—"

"No more bills to worry about," said Cotter. "I am going to build a bigger and better sanitarium out in Arizona."

"Arizona? But the bills—"

"I will pay with cash," said Cotter. "For, René, I would like you to meet your new employer. She has just paid me a million dollars for Balm Springs. In *cash!*"

"Employer?" I gaped.

"I hope you'll take charge here," said Ginger. "I know so little about such things."

"Of course. But . . . but Bill—"

"We'll cure him," said Ginger, "in a week or two. He's no longer dependent upon his family, you see. A . . . er . . . rich aunt died and left him lots of money."

"You see?" said Cotter, beaming. "You see? Now, you two just talk it over. I'm going out and tell those bricklayers what I think of them."

Bill did not tell me this story for two years. But he was an easygoing sort and I guess he didn't get around to it before that. And even while he told it, you could see his mind was on Ginger, out there, waiting to go for a short cruise with him. And when Bill had finished, he gave me a half-apologetic smile.

Jilbo was in the hallway.

"Cap'n Bill, suh," said Jilbo. "Ifn you gwine go fo' anothah boat ride, why cain't I put no fishin' gear in it fo' m'self. Ain' you nevah goin' to let me do no fishin' a-tall?"

"Not," said Bill, walking on, "while I'm in my right mind."

I watched him go down the steps and out through the gate to Ginger and they walked away arm in arm.

And then my gaze wandered to the lamp-post beside the steps, the one with the knot in it. I'd thought for some time that that knot had stayed there too long to be the product of mass hypnotism.

THE END.

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***Harold Shea had a great system—it was going to take him back to the world of Irish mythology, to live it with the legendary heroes! It was wonderful! And he was going prepared. Only— He didn't go where he expected; he landed in the midst of Ragnarook—the Twilight of the Gods in Norse mythology, which was no place for a cautious adventurer. His preparations didn't work. His flashlight wouldn't light. His matches wouldn't burn. He couldn't even read the hen-tracks that his books had turned too! But—he made a lovely yarn for***

L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP AND FLETCHER PRATT

"THE ROARING TRUMPET"

in the May UNKNOWN

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# THE AFRICAN TRICK

by H. W. GUERNSEY

**A blackmailer, an explorer, and a strange—very strange —tree. It produced a queer and lovely sort of fruit—**

Illustrated by R. Isip

THE bell bonged like an old clock striking one, and Vladimir lit a cigarette before sauntering to the entrance. Waiting patiently was a stoutish, gray-headed mailman, who in silence handed young Kirov a parcel and a sheaf of five envelopes.

Returning to the apartment, Vla-

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dimir inspected the package with increasing blankness before opening it. The dimensions and heft were about equal to five volumes of the "Arabian Nights," but the contents were liquid. From within came gurgles when he shook the thing experimentally. The wrapping was heavy, brown paper, and was stained as though it had traveled in the bottom of a leaky ship. There were stamps aplenty, canceled and recanceled at various points in Africa, and finally in New York. The printing of his name and the address on Fourteenth Street did not suggest the hand of anyone he remembered. Certainly he didn't know anyone in Africa. In the corner where he might expect to find the sender's name and address was only the carefully printed legend, "CONTAINS SPECIMEN." With a shrug, he exhaled cigarette smoke characteristically from the corner of his mouth and cut the tough cord at the knot.

Inside was a square tin box. With the handle of a spoon he pried up the lid. He pulled out some crumpled paper wadding; then, from a nest of paper wadded so tight that the sides of the can bulged, he drew a heavy, cylindrical glass jar which was sealed with a screw-on metal cap. As he stared, holding up the jar for inspection, only the minute, shifting glints in his black eyes signifying the fascination that kept his sensual lips parted and made him stand so still, he remembered in substance a passage from a battered old book in Dr. Leyden's library up in the country, from a volume of Melville probably: "My friend, Atahalpa, the astrologer and alchemist, has long had a jar, in which he has been endeavoring to hatch a fairy, the ingredients being compounded according to a receipt of his own." Vladimir's lips moved, forming the syllables of maudible profanity.

He set the jar down on a table and went around the room turning on all the lights. Coming back, he saw the letters, which had come to rest fanwise on the table.

One and a half cent stamps, and glossy paper; he threw the advertisements away without opening them. One letter was from a friend, Arthur Pughes, up in Mamaroneck; he put it aside for the moment. Because the fatter letter was from Dr. Leyden, Dr. Junius Leyden, and again there were the exotic foreign stamps. It was only a name to Vladimir, the awkwardly printed name in the cancellation, of the city somewhere on the coast of the vast, secret-holding continent of Africa, which on the globe is mapped like a horned skull, with Mozambique as the nose, and Lake Victoria as the eye looking southeast over Madagascar into the Indian Ocean.

Vladimir slit open the envelope, spread the twice-folded inclosure of deckled rag paper and read, in Leyden's painstaking, angular backhand in reddish brown ink:

Fork, Africa.
August 10, 1939.

MY DEAR VLADIMIR:

I suppose you have been wondering where I am, and I assure you that you are as well informed as myself. This place is quite some distance in the interior of this inexhaustible continent; it will take me a few weeks to get out again, which I will endeavor to do about the time you are reading now. I have named the place —a village of fewer than a hundred persons, possibly no more than four or five dozen—as above, because it happens to be at the fork of a branch of a Congoid (or Congolese?) river which I started out on. The natives don't call it by any name. They merely spread their hands and say "H'a," which is pretty close to our own "here." So I am simply here.

Just a little while ago I came across something remarkable, and I thought of you at once because you have always been

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so interested in the department of horticulture. When I hired you as gardener at the place upstate, I thought you were young, but you proved yourself quite capable. Quite capable indeed. I commend you. Your sagacity anent growing things will certainly ensure you a long journey.

Separately, in a jar and in a tin, I am sending you that remarkable item which I mentioned, and I hope that it arrives intact. While I am writing this the man is waiting, sitting over there at the river bank with the parcel under his arm, and he will go down the river until he arrives where he can pay money for postage on the package and letter.

The specimen in the jar is a seed, and is to be planted. I imagine it will be as hard for you to believe as it was for me, but I have seen the tree and its startling, large blossoms. What I am sending you is extremely rare.

The jar was first boiled in a caldron to sterilize it, then was filled partially with a liquor concocted by the headman from steeped herbs. The liquor renders the seed flexible, as you will find; otherwise a tendril or "limb" of the seed might be fractured in planting and it would not grow.

Do not handle it. The seed. When you remove it from the jar, allow it to remain on clean tissue only long enough to dry, and then plant immediately or it will not work. And don't throw away the jarful of liquor, because you have to use it.

The directions for planting are as follows:

Get a ten- or twelve-inch wooden pot, such as you would use for a large amaryllis, from the florist around your corner, and proceed mostly as you would with a bulb. Cover the holes in the bottom of the tub with shards, and remember that this must be watered from below and that you must use the liquor in the jar. I am only detailing this routine which you know so well because it is so important. Fill the tub to an inch of the top with the ordinary brown earth which you get from the florist. The earth must be dry, and also with no sheep manure in it. The soil should be sterile.

Place the pod (or seed, or shoot, or growth, or whatever you want to call it) in the soil so that the head just emerges, with the feet down. Then set the wooden pot in a bowl large enough to take the liquid in the jar. Set the pot in, and pour in the contents of the jar as though you were watering any plant properly from below.

Do this at night, and leave it alone in a dark place, because light will kill the plant at the beginning. The air must be moist. If you succeed, you will have a plant, a tree, rarer than any other.

I imagine that by the time I return, and bring your bell, that I will find the tree well started, and not so far along that it has to be put into a larger tub.

Also, you may have been concerned about my indebtedness to you. It will be taken care of when I can get back out of this raw jungle. This is a jungle, believe me. In the meantime, my best regards.

As always,

LEYDEN.

VLADIMIR squinted at the jar again in the strong light, and he wasn't dreaming. Remarkable, Leyden said; that was an understatement. The object in the jar couldn't be a seed. It was a figurine of the most delicate, flawless fashioning imaginable, as exquisitely proportioned as though a human being through some unguessable magic had been scaled down to the dimensions of this tiny girl in the bottle.

She might have been six inches in height, and when Vladimir shook the bottle she performed in the disturbed liquid of her prison with the slow turnings and obediences and *tour de force* acrobatics of a living being just drowned now. It was quite convincing and disturbing, the dallying grace with which an arm trailed and then bent at the elbow, and when she settled to the bottom of the bottle nearly erect, head bowed. One foot touched, then the other, and slowly the knees bent and she sat and at last lay in an unaffected posture of sleep. She was not a carving, in an ordinary sense. But as a fabrication of man's or nature's in the unknown, yielding material of which she was made, she was finished in completest detail, down to microscopic toenails and fingernails; her hair was black and as fine as a clinging blur of dye. The hair streamed



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in the liquid as though in the gentlest, stealthiest breeze and looked dry, as do things seen under water.

And on her forehead was a mark, in a deep red that looked black, which Vladimir finally made out to be a circle quartered by a cross.

He was not inclined to plant the fairy in the ground like a seed, much preferring to keep her in her present state as a miracle to behold, but his association with Leyden was peculiar in a respect, and the directions for planting were orders. When Leyden returned from Africa he would expect to find something sprouting, and he couldn't be fooled.

Before Vladimir went out that night he got a ten-inch pot, filled it with common soil, and got a large bowl from the kitchen in which to set the pot.

He fished the peewee girl from the jar with a spoon, and delicately disposed her on a wad of tissue on a pillow. He had her in the palm of his hand for an instant and her shape was quite yielding, as quite as though she were a human being in miniature, letting her head and arms and legs rest so, accommodating her infinitesimal self to the hollow of his palm, her legs hanging over free, and her red lips too minute for any certainty that they were shaped in a smile. Vladimir had strong hands, and his muscles flinched as though at a light needle prick from the crazy, inexplicable impulse to snap his fingers shut and crush to a shapeless gob what he held.

If he had thought about the impulse later on, he would have regretted not obeying it. Certainly he had the guilty Leyden on the hip, but down in Africa the unforgiving, conscienceless doctor was patiently awaiting the consequences of a brand of perfidy which was not by any means novel in purpose, but which in its functioning was unrecognizable even by a lanky intellectual with Vladimir's lively suspicions. If Leyden had sent him an elephant-hair ring, Vladimir would have made sure that it wasn't subtly barbed and poisoned before he put it on his finger. Similarly, if he had unwrapped a heathen image in ebony, with ivory teeth and stone eyes, he would have examined it all over to find out where the craftsman had cunningly concealed the cork of a hollowed vessel packed with explosive. That was an exaggeration, but Vladimir was in a way as interested as a cat on a hot stove, in the always wary position of having to look gift horses in the teeth.

VLADIMIR was connected with Dr. Leyden remuneratively, but not comfortably at all. In the past three years Leyden had sent a number of gifts in token of counterfeit friendship. A few of them Vladimir had opened under water in the bathtub, and once ruined a brass box of rare incense from China.

Leyden traveled a great deal. As long as he returned to New York regularly it was no skin off Vladimir's sharp nose, and if he tried to lose himself in any far corner of the Earth the untranquil doctor could always be extradited.

As long as Leyden lived, Vladimir had a good thing and meant to hold on to it. There was no contract which guaranteed his ten thousand a year, not written nor verbal, merely admitted through innuendo. For the secret they shared, Vladimir was charging all the traffic would bear. In brief, Vladimir was a blackmailer. The arrangement of a yearly salary, instead of calling it quits for a lump sum, was satisfactory to both parties, Leyden being full aware of the fact that his former employee

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would always be back for more anyhow.

Vladimir made a little grave in the pot, and buried the exquisite manikin according to Leyden's directions. He poured the liquor from the jar into the bowl, and set it in the pot.

For a moment or two he watched the level of liquid sink creepingly as it was pulled up into the earth in the pot; then he turned the lights off and went out for an evening which would not return him home until after midnight. The bowl, with the pot inside, was left on the kitchen floor.

About an hour after his departure there was only a trace of moisture in the bowl. Over the rounded earth in the pot appeared a feather of thin mist which increased in density as an ascending plume with the minutes passing. It was visible in the darkness. The plume remained intact, though the involved motion of the climbing fumes was as though it was trying to break out of an expanding envelope. The cloud thinned to invisibility at the base, and the whole of the restlessly struggling, churning column was free. A razor-thin freak of light, colored as though electrical in nature, measured the column from head to foot for the briefest wink of time.

Any performing magician possessing such a trick in his reportoire would have rendered any Missouri-born audience bugeyed to the last man. Because the girl standing barefoot on the linoleum in Vladimir Kirov's kitchen was, indubitably, a girl, and standing there. Putting it redundantly, she occupied exactly the space which she displaced. Her shapeliness was that of the diminutive pickled witch in the jar from Africa, sculptured in consummate life-size. She stood with her weight planted equally on both feet, standing in the darkness with her head turned aside, as though listening to a muted voice, muted by the distance, say, of a few thousand miles and a few hours as the crow flies. Then she began to move subtly about the apartment, pausing strategically and listening as though receiving instructions step by step.

IN THE VILLAGE which Leyden called Fork, in Africa, deep in the jungle at the fork of two small rivers, the headman of the tribe sat on his heels in a large hut. Between his knees, from a shallow bowl on the ground, climbed a ribbon of aromatic bluish-white vapor which scarcely wavered in the breathless air. From time to time the headman added a pinch of powder to the coal, which was a dull-red bud of light on the ground in the twilight of the hut. It was always twilight. In this valley, it seemed, if an explorer spent only a day in hacking a trail into the jungle, it would take just as long to hack his way out, things grew so fast.

The only sensible method was to use the rivers until they gave out, and then give up and return. If the few men who tried to get through in the past, into the pile-up of green mountain occasionally glimpsed ahead, had made it, they hadn't been heard of again. The region was shunned by the Negroes. Leyden's own little gang of blacks had halted at the last landing place, just inside the mouth of the valley, whence they could go yelling into the ready boats and pole like mad down the river to the outside if any grounds for their superstitions developed.

Proceeding alone in the launch, Leyden threaded through the tunnel of jungle on a narrow, muddy river that flowed as smooth as petroleum. When he reached the fork he turned

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right, and quickly reached a barrier of boulders sticking three feet and more out of the water. At this point he indulged in some mental grunting, because it was fairly evident that, worn and weathered as the rocks were, the barrier was artificial. The rock was quarried, crudely dressed for this purpose, and planted in the bed of the river to make it impassable except for fish.

He returned and tried the other fork. After following about the same number of meanderings as before, he nosed up to a huge tree, felled to lie across the river. He ran the launch ashore into mud, jerked fast a couple of turns of rope around a stout root, and lit a cigarette. On this bank the jungle was cleared to some extent. He walked around the upsticking mass of roots, and along the river bank because the idea of getting lost for any length of time at all wasn't appealing.

The sound of a commotion made him jerk his head. Watching him from only thirty feet away, the headman had been gathering herbs, and he had also just been attacked by a museum-size snake. There was more of the python than Leyden had ever seen even in a nightmare; its bloody jaws were clamped on the headman's shoulder, and the stout coils were looping around his body in one horrible crawling and crushing embrace after another. While the long groan was issuing from the headman's chest, Leyden pulled the heavy revolver from his belt with the clockwork casualness of an expert marksman and smashed a shot through the snake's head. The running coils went wild. The headman had an arm free, and both men went to work with the long, heavy, machete-style knives with which they were armed.

Leyden thought the headman was white but couldn't identify the nationality. He introduced himself, and the other responded with the name Ja'el.

The headman Ja'el was a six-footer, an inch taller than Leyden. He was lean, of indeterminate age because only his face was wrinkled, and delicately, at the ears and eye sockets. His forehead was glassy-smooth, and if at a glance he looked young the mistake was realized in considering his dignity of bearing and the incalculable aloofness of wisdom in his eyes. His eyes were large and electrifyingly positive blue in color, his hair was black and worn short, and in the shadows his skin was a pale-olive, as though it had never been touched by the sun. Without even perfunctory gratitude for Leyden's deadly marksmanship, the headman led him through the woods to the village.

MYSTERIOUS people. All of them were live-skinned, European in features, with eyes of that arresting night-sky blue, as alike as innumerable twins varying only and imperceptibly in ages. Their valley was in the heart of Africa, and they were not negroid.

The headman Ja'el was the one crouching so patiently over the gold bowl from which rose the incense-soft vapor of the burning powder. In the hut with him was Leyden, his lean form clad only in bleached khaki shorts and sandals, lying on a mat, watching. Also present was the headman's protégé, a lad, squatting imitatively in a corner and also watching.

This people had gold, and Leyden wondered where they got it. It was worked, too. Old. Very old.

What remarkable people. Leyden speculated on where they had come from, as he had speculated for days

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on that intriguing matter and others. There weren't many natives; he had seen about fifty men performing various tasks, amusing themselves, caught signs of a monotheistic religion. Mumbo-jumbo, of course. They worshiped a tree. Altogether there couldn't have been many more than two hundred, certainly no more than three hundred, in this race isolated here, effectually isolated in a valley in the deep jungle by the geography and the superstition palisading it from the outside. Only the headman acknowledged Leyden's presence. The others ignored him altogether, passing him by no matter what dialect he tried on them. They never looked at him, the outsider, only through him if a glance happened to come his way.

And there were no women in the village at all. Not one that he saw, or heard, or found any indication of. He thought there must be other villages in the valley, and that the men and women lived separately according to some cockeyed primitive law, but he couldn't find out from the headman. Ja'el merely shook his head, not as though he didn't know, but as though it was none of Dr. Junius Leyden's business.

Leyden changed his position on the mat, watching the headman, and wiped sweat from his face and the channel from his throat down to the flat musculature of his stomach. He watched. Because of a number of things he had observed in detail during his stay, chiefly the tree which these peope worshiped, he was grimly unskeptical of the headman's promised results. He had seen a few things, and he had received a promise that was working. Ja'el fanned his fingers through the rising smoke and inhaled it. Suppose these people came down from Egypt, Leyden thought, or from across the Mediterranean, or from the west or *where*. And that damned tree growing in the yard in the midst of all but obliterated ruins.

Hours ago the headman had announced: "He has received it. He is reading your letter. He is inspecting the seed closely."

Now he said: "Everything is ready; he has left the house, and now, now—" He nodded. "She's there."

Leyden said, "You mean one of those manikins"—the headman had a box full of the strange seeds—"that seed I sent to Kirov, has grown to life-size?"

"I wouldn't say it grew," the headman said gently. "But it's life-size, all right, and alive."

"Then there's a live girl in Kirov's place."

"Quite alive," Ja'el assured him. "Quiet now." He peered intently through the smoke rising between his knees, whiffing like a wine connoisseur, looking into the deepest distance.

Proof that Ja'el wasn't faking was his being able to describe the floor plan and furnishings of Kirov's apartment, and Leyden had visited Vladimir more than once and knew. Dr. Leyden had traveled far and wide, and he had seen the Indian rope trick, seen an undesirable member of a tribe killed by the simple means of being hated industriously to death by five men proficient in hating, a beautiful Chinese girl turned into a witless old hag by a curse, witnessed undeniable magic exercised by lamas in Tibet. Hence he wasn't particularly round-eyed at the witchwork of the headman of a lost white tribe in the jungle. All Leyden asked for was results, and he had patience enough.

The young apprentice crouched, watching closely, and the headman

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sat tirelessly on his heels, observing and directing with his unique mental telescope what was going on in the apartment thousands of miles away in Manhattan, as though his eyes and brain were in the head of the girl there.

WALKING as though hypnotized, which in a sense she was, the girl proceeded to a wall switch and turned the lights on. In the headman's control, she received his instructions and pulled out a drawer in a chest. From it, since she wouldn't remain unarrested long on the street as she was, she took a woolen gabardine sport shirt and donned it, and from a wordrobe got a pair of gabardine slacks and belted them on. She had long legs and the trousers weren't a bad fit. There was a pair of alligator slippers that fit her, either left behind by an overnight guest or Vladimir's feet being small.

Last, she stooped and pulled out the bottom drawer of a small chest, used as a telephone stand, in the corner. The chest was modern and legless, its bottom flush against the floor. In the aperture between the floor and the bottom of the drawer was a flat tin box filled with money. Vladimir didn't trust banks. From his point of vantage down in the jungle, Ja'el had watched Vladimir deal himself out the evening's expense money from the hiding place.

Ready to go places now, she was brought back from the door by an oversight caught just in time. Returning to the wardrobe she selected a porkpie hat and fitted it on with the brim pulled down in front to conceal the conspicuous mark on her forehead, the quartered circle like a brand in dark red.

Obviously a girl in this outfit could circulate in public unchallenged, especially at night. The porkpie only made her bearing saucy, and the slacks and shirt were as much feminine apparel as masculine. She found dress and lingerie shops open in the village, and splurged herself to a complete outfit for traveling. For, of course, with her work completed in Manhattan she would waste no time negotiating her return to her people, in the valley in the jungle, at the confluence of the two rivers. Even if she wished to stay she had nothing to say about it. The return trip wouldn't take long. The clipper would get her to South America, whence she would make the hop across the South Atlantic. Tonight there was nothing much to do save go back to the apartment and wait for Vladimir.

There was no point in changing into her newly purchased garb just yet. She sat in an easy-chair facing the door, and smoked cigarettes to pass the time.

After midnight, six hours later jungle time, Vladimir's key chattered in the lock. When he entered he didn't see her at first, and threw the bolt of the deadlock. He was moderately drunk, having been doing a few of the clubs uptown in the Fifties and pretending he was listed among café society. Neither did he see her when he turned around and sailed his hat into the sofa even though his eyes were glued on her, because he didn't believe she was there.

Then he said somewhat waggishly, "Hey. What are you doing here?"

NATURALLY Leyden had not committed himself to any extent in his letter to Vladimir. When the letter was found and read, it could never be deduced that Leyden and Kirov were not old friends, but, in fact, bitterest enemies at least on Leyden's part. Neither of them ever alluded

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to the beginnings of their relationship.

Around six o'clock in the morning down in the jungle, having awakened from a catnap at a sound of comment from the preoccupied headman, Leyden was thinking of that business.

Back then, he had a country house in New York State. He had a young wife, Mabel, who was quite lovely, and had been a showgirl not averse

*With surprising strength, she looped the belt around his throat and suspended him from a convenient door—*

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to marrying moderate wealth, and who had too many friends of her own age to remain precisely faithful. Privately she referred to Dr. Junius Leyden as the Old Goat, a phrase which did happen to describe the doctor very well. Mummy would have done, also; he was white-headed, lean, and tanned to a permanent wrinkled tobacco—Macedonian—brown by his travels. She did not like the rigors of expeditions into the far corners which Leyden had on his list, and on general principles that was all right with him.

She thought she was rigging her expenses with the easy resources and sagacity with which little girls are born, but Leyden was an old hand at sharp dealing, what with his jaunts through Indian bazaars, and dickering with diamond merchants and sharp Jews and sharper Arabs and robbers in the desert. Mabel was a highly ornamental trophy, but she was in error in pricing herself above the matchless jade Budd in his den, for the which he had paid a fortune.

He faked the necessity of a trip down to the city, and Mabel knew something was amiss. When Leyden got back to the house he found his young wife packed and all set to vanish from his ken, no matter how good an explorer he was.

Used to stalking game, he stepped into the house through the French doors and surprised her without effort, matter-of-factly. Perhaps the money and the peck of jewelry were legally hers. With them, leaving her suitcases where they were, she ran for her little roadster parked in front of the house because she knew the jig was up. She had dandy legs, and running for her little life she skimmed over the lawn as though she had wings.

With all her training in dancing she was easily the Old Goat's better in a footrace. But it took him only a jiffy to grab a revolver from his desk. A hawk-eyed marksman, he pegged just one shot, in the twilight, into her head just beneath her flying hair. For a step or two it looked as though she were going to keep right on running, and then she scattered herself headlong.

Junius didn't choose to let imprisonment nor execution for murder interfere with his exploring a few more remote regions of the globe in which he was interested, so he returned her car to the garage, considered in detail and obliterated the evidence of crime and believed it a job well done. He notified the law that Mabel Leyden was a missing person.

On the country property was a greenhouse in which were orchids and strange plants from foreign parts, and the gardener and man of all work was Vladimir Kirov, a young fellow who knew his gardening and how to nurture plants.

Intelligent, Vladimir came to his famous boss and said: "The first thing the cops will do is hunt the grounds, and where you buried her the cops will find her right away. I moved her."

"Really?" Leyden asked, thinking he was going to have to shoot Vladimir, too. "Where did you bury her?"

"So long as you don't know," Vladimir observed, "you won't be able to tell nor give yourself away, will you, sir?"

Thus Vladimir became an accessory, at the profitable salary of Man of No Work. Police did search the grounds, and as Vladimir had intimated, they found what might have been and which had been a grave, though they didn't know it, in a large stone flower box in the greenhouse. Even now Leyden didn't know where his gardener had buried

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his wife, but so long as the police didn't, either, it didn't matter. That was that. It didn't surprise the cops any that a peachy girl like Mabel had run away from a gnome-old husband like Leyden, no matter what his standing was in his field.

Down here in the jungle he had had the luck to save the headman's life. Ja'el politely insisted: "Now I must do something for you, something of equal importance."

"Forget it," said Leyden. "You don't owe me anything."

"I'm sorry," Ja'el insisted, "but it's required. What can I do for you?"

"Well, maybe you can tell me what goes on here. You know the blacks are superstitious and won't come into this valley."

"Yes, we kill them when they come in."

"But you're white," said Leyden.

"So are you," said Ja'el. "It signifies nothing. Would you like gold? White men like gold, and we have plenty of it, as much as you can carry in your boat. Many loads."

"I've got all the money I want, and I've seen a dry river in South America where there were as many nuggets as stones. It's too much trouble getting the stuff out. It weighs too much."

"Yes, it is heavy." Ja'el inspected Leyden, and after a while inquired, "Have you by any chance an enemy who you wish to be rid of?"

"More a nuisance than an enemy," Leyden admitted. "I keep thinking about him and it annoys me. You know what I mean. When you find a bloodsucker fastened on you, you pull it off and mash it under your heel because you're instinctively disgusted with it for what it is."

"Exactly," Ja'el agreed. "It can be arranged."

The deal was made, Vladimir to be taken care of in return for Ja'el's life being saved, and Leyden was allowed to stay in the village, though he was strictly ignored by all the population save the headman.

In the headman's hut, still blinking with his awakening, Leyden rose stiffly and brushed earth from himself. Around the walls in the large single room were shelves laden with metal and pottery dishes, carvings of wood and ivory and stone, packaged stuff, food, something like a musky general store in which only secrets were purveyed. Along the wall on the floor were heavy casks, and in the big one, which was locked with a primitive lock, was the hoard of strange seeds shaped like tiny, flawlessly proportioned human figures, all of them female just as all the inhabitants of the village were men.

During a silent yawn Leyden issued from the hut and looked about. He went down to the river and looked at its glassy-black silent flow, and returned, fidgeting. He turned up the main village street and continued until it ended at the edge of the ruins. He couldn't go any farther without getting into trouble. He had been warned. A group of men of the unknown race materialized nearby, looking everywhere but at him and idling, ready to jump him if he violated their hospitality.

The ruins formed a great square, in the middle of which was a gentle rise of ground. The jungle had swept back over all, and it was hard to see much. But in that twilight there were pyramids in the Mayan style, crumbled to mounds. There was a section of paved court, with the jewel colors of enamel showing here ad there. The wall had been high but was wrecked completely to a mound. Where the main gate of the wall had been, Leyden could look

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a couple of hundred feet into the forbidden area, where there was a heap of rubble and a fallen monolith, carved, which raked up into the sky like a big gun.

In front of that fallen-in pile grew the huge tree. The trunk of it went up as straight as a shot, and the symmetrical, spreading head of foliage was so thick that nothing grew in the sandy ground in the black shadow beneath. The fine bark of the cylindrical bole was wrinkled black. The leaves were deep-green, long and pointed, thick, and waxy, and in the whole mass of foliage not a leaf stirred.

Leyden could see just one flower in the foliage, and that was a huge bloom whose petals were an explosion of red and yellow and purple, bounded in a margin of flickering pale green.

It was the only tree of its kind on Earth, and he wanted one of those flowers. After the look in Ja'el's eyes he didn't dare ask again. He started to enter the ruins, and the group of natives, olive-skinned, husky and menacing, started for him. Leyden went back to the hut, entered and looked at the headman.

IN HIS APARTMENT in Manhattan —it was his apartment, Vladimir was quite sure of that—he swayed a little on his feet and demanded of the girl, "Well?"

She was wearing his clothes. She had his blue porkpie on, and his sport shirt and slacks, and his alligator slippers. On the big table was a pile of packages.

"I've been waiting for you," she said.

"You've been waiting for me." He squinted, closing one eye so that there wouldn't be two of her, and in his idiom he saw that she was one gorgeous, one good-looking Jill. He grinned appreciatively, managing an unintended leer, because a beautiful girl is a beautiful girl, especially when she is on the premises and there isn't any competition.

"Yes," said Jill, and rose to meet the step he took toward her. She peeled off the porkpie and dropped it into the chair behind her, and smiled at him bewitchingly.

Her lips were something to anticipate, but Vladimir nearly whinnied when he breathed because he was looking at the mark on her forehead. The design wasn't tattooed, it was just there—the circle, and the downward stroke and crosswise one quartering it. It was an old emblem, common to all peoples, Christian and pagan. It was the common symbol of the Isles of the Innocent, the Isles of the Blessed, of Eden, Paradise, Atlantis, of legend. It represented an island quartered by four rivers, in the Golden Age, and was the most ancient symbol of all. As far as Vladimir was concerned, the brand on her forehead was the same as that on the figurine which he had planted in the pot out in the kitchen.

As she stepped forward, smiling, Jill moistened her lips, and Vladimir backed up against the door. Without any warning there was violence, and Vladimir found himself on the floor half stunned. There were hands around his throat.

Letting out a laryngitic yell, he turned completely around and scrambled, and was able to get free and bolt, primed with the fury of effort that comes from fear.

He tipped over the pot and bowl in the kitchen doorway. The bowl broke, the pot spilled the earth, and the seed which he had planted wasn't there any more in the pile of dirt thrown along the linoleum, and he came down flat on his chin and stomach. Before he knew it she was

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sitting on him and her fingers were closing around his throat again. She was strong.

He had his lungs full of air for a yell, and he couldn't force out a whisper. With all his might he managed to get out a squawk while he flailed two or three flails with his legs and arms. When it was time, she took her fingers away from his throat and he lay there, a business of arms and legs unmoving, unbreathing, in a posture as though he were trying like mad to get hold of something important.

She removed his belt, which was leather with a silver buckle. She made a loop of it, found hammer and nails, and nailed the tongue of the belt to the wood of the high doorway. The woodwork of the apartment was mahogany painted with cream enamel, and the door frames were ten feet high. Jill nailed the belt fast and tugged at it.

Vladimir was a scanty Russian, weighing not much more than a hundred and forty pounds. She lifted him, and slipped his head through the loop of the belt, and let him drop. The leather strip ran through the silver buckle, and stopped, and Vladimir's heels banged against the bottom panels of the door. If the hyoid bone in his throat hadn't been fractured when she throttled him, it was fractured now, and the police could make up their minds when they came in and looked around.

Since it was late, she disposed herself on the sofa, and after a glance at Vladimir, went to sleep.

THE HEADMAN, Ja'el, wafted smoke away from his face and told Leyden, "Your friend, Kirov, is dead."

"How did he die?"

"Choked, and then hung from his belt."

"Hm-m-m. Good," said Leyden.

"Now that you are ready to go," said Ja'el—and Leyden was packed, actually, ready to go back down the river—"we will have a toast."

The headman got a cup made of a gourd sawed in half, which made a container holding fourteen ounces or so. Into it he poured liquor from a cask, raised it and drank half. Leyden accepted the cup and drained the remainder. The stuff was highly alcoholic, and Leyden all but choked on it.

He bowed, and made his departure; he was escorted down to the big tree lying across the river by twelve men who never spoke nor looked at him, but who made sure that he got back to the launch which he had secured to the root of the tree.

Leyden got into the launch, feeling as drunk as a goat. That was powerful tarantula juice which the headman brewed. That was the last thing he remembered.

JA'EL, the headman, said to his apprentice, "Did you take care of everything?"

"Yes, I did. I took care of everything."

"The snake?"

"Yes, Ja'el, the snake. Develeth has the snake in a little wicker cage, and will put it into the boat of the doctor."

"The proper little mean black snake with the red spots?"

"The proper little mean black snake with the red spots."

The headman prowled around the hut and came back, and sat on his heels, and his apprentice looked at him, and he looked at his apprentice.

Dr. Leyden had violated the tribe's hospitality; he had stolen one of the seeds from the cask in the corner, to take back to civilization

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with him, and that was something that couldn't be allowed. Because these few dozens of people in the valley were an absolutely pure race, without the admixture of any other degree of white, black, yellow, brown, red, or any other race.

"What is the penalty for theft?" Ja'el asked.

"Death," said his apprentice noncommittally, by rote.

Ja'el had shared a drink with the doctor, but in Leyden's share was a drug which would render him unconscious by the time he reached his boat. The seed which he had stolen would be stolen back. The deadly little snake would be put into the boat with him, and he would be bitten and die. The boat would be set adrift in the river, and he would be dead when he reached the mouth of the valley.

It was just, and the headman nodded.

The doctor had killed his wife, and her body would be found under the flagstones outside the greenhouse. All his wealth would go to his wife's relatives. Vladimir Kirov's relatives in Russia would get nothing, since according to American law, there were no individuals in a totalitarian state.

"Pretty silly, isn't it?" Ja'el asked. "I mean, just the business of living."

"There isn't any profit in it in the end," his young apprentice agreed.

"We're the only pure race on Earth," said Ja'el, "and the population is steadily diminishing. Damn it, there's something wrong about being cursed."

"There is, indeed."

"Come along with me," the headman ordered, and his apprentice followed him out of the hut, and up the street to the square of ruins. They went inside, and up to the tree in front of the pile of rubbish that had been a temple. They stared up into the thick, deep-green, waxy foliage.

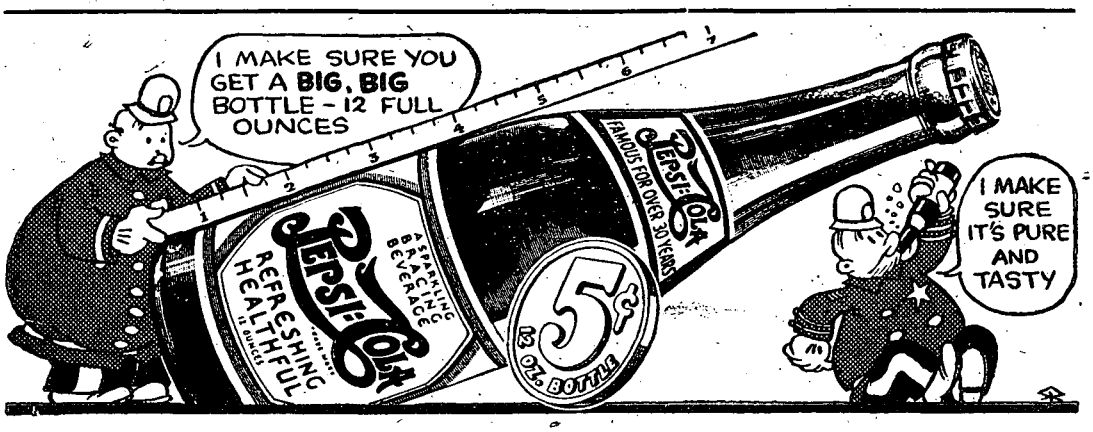
"There are fewer blossoms each time," said Ja'el.

"Fewer and fewer," the apprentice admitted.

"In a hundred years more, two or three hundred years at the outside, we'll be gone. Vanished. Wiped out," said Ja'el. "Last time, there were five blossoms"—and from these came the seeds shaped like tiny human beings—"and this time there are only three. Next time there may be none."

"Yes," said the apprentice somberly.

Together they stared up at the unimaginable blooms, just three of them, the incredible great flamboyant flowers with their petals like frozen flame.


I MAKE SURE YOU GET A BIG, BIG BOTTLE - 12 FULL OUNCES
PEPSI-COLA
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You doubt it? Well, reasonably enough, so did Bertram Moore. But he argued the point with the wrong—eh, man.

# ALL IS ILLUSION

by HENRY KUTTNER

Illustrated by F. Kramer

BERTRAM MOORE should never have entered the strange little tavern. But, even so, he might have avoided serious trouble had he kept his temper and refused to argue with the belligerent midget with the fuzzy

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whiskers. Mr. Moore, being Irish, certainly should have suspected something amiss from the moment he walked into the unusual taproom.

A tall, gawky, and red-haired fellow was Bertram, with a face somewhat reminiscent of a philosophic horse—not really ugly, though. The sort of average, fortyish person one sees every day, a little past his prime but not yet beginning to crumble. A likable guy, though he talked too much.

Bertram Moore had a watch, and this watch could really be blamed for the whole affair. It wasn't an unusual timepiece. Quite an ordinary one, in fact. But it was Moore's watch, and thereby had acquired a certain air of sanctity to him. He wound it religiously and consulted its passionless face whenever necessary. The only trouble tonight was that its hands pointed at eight thirty instead of seven thirty. This nonconformity caused Moore to arrive at the Union Depot exactly one hour too soon to meet his sister, Corinne, who, after living in New York for twenty-five years, had suddenly looked around her, fought down a fit of violent nausea, and decided to visit Bertram.

Moore was not a man of sudden impulse. He compared his watch with the clock on the depot tower, found several other timepieces, and finally, to clinch the argument, asked a porter what time it was. Seven thirty. Corinne's train would not arrive for an hour. Moore stared around at the painfully clean and glittering depot and hastily went toward the bar.

One glance through the glass door, however, dissuaded him. The room was sardine-full. Moore, being civilized, preferred to hoist his elbow in comparative quiet, so he emerged from the depot and stared around. Across the street was an empty lot. It had been empty for years, what with taxes, high rents, and depression. Much to Moore's surprise, however, he saw that a building had been erected on the lot.

Things had a way of popping up overnight, Moore thought, and was much closer to the truth than he knew. He walked toward the structure. It was a high-arched dome, something like the Brown Derby without its brim, and there were no windows. From the swinging doors clouds of smoke and the noise of merriment proceeded. Moore entered and burst into a spasm of coughing.

At first he could see nothing for the smoke. The big room was filled with it, a gray, coiling cloud pungent with the aroma of scented tobacco. Then, gradually, Moore began to make out objects through the mist.

There were no booths. Tables were set at random here and there, until they vanished hazily into the fog. People sat at the tables, and at the nearest one was a bald, fat old man with a blaze of jeweled rings hiding his fingers. He was smoking a narghile, and emitting an extraordinary amount of smoke, Moore thought. Moreover, his clothing was unorthodox. He wore a goatskin strategically, and a wreath of vine leaves on his bald dome completed the ensemble. This was obviously either a masquerade or an advertising stunt.

The fat old man hiccuped loudly, lifted a pewter mug from the table, drained it, and waved negligently to Moore. He said something in a language Moore did not understand. But his gesture, as he pointed to a nearby table, was eloquent enough.

Moore advanced and took his seat at the table. Most of the others were occupied, he discovered, by a

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motley assortment. It was difficult to see clearly through the fog, but he thought their clothing, while more plentiful than the old man's, was equally odd. He caught glimpses of high-crowned and pointed hats, white robes, black robes, and similar eccentricities.

The waiter approached. He seemed normal enough, a cadaverous man rather grimly dressed in a Tuxedo. His sallow face was quite expressionless, and his eyes were peculiarly glazed. In his lapel he wore a lily. Also, he walked with the stiff, mechanical stride of a zombie.

"Your order, sir?" he asked in a deep, grating voice.

"Whiskey sour," Moore said. The man departed, returning almost immediately. He set down a pewter mug on the table. Moore paid, and tested the drink. It wasn't a whiskey sour. He was sure of that. But he didn't know just what it was. It was heady, strong, pungent, and yet curiously sweet. The fumes mounted to his brain swiftly. Potent stuff.

Now Moore always could carry his liquor, and he certainly couldn't have got tight on one mugful. Yet his head was unquestionably swimming when the belligerent midget with the fuzzy whiskers arrived.

AT FIRST GLIMPSE Moore saw only beard, a vast, overwhelming avalanche of curly white hair that floated across the floor like a tumbleweed. The beard mounted the chair opposite Moore's. A small hand emerged from the mess and thumped the table. Two beady, twinkling eyes regarded Moore with a certain sardonic humor in their depths.

The waiter brought a pair of brimming mugs. The midget began the conversation.

"Nasty curmudgeon," he said throatily, staring at Moore, who pointedly ignored the remark. But the midget could not be squelched.

From the depths of his beard he extracted a long, keen knife and thumbed its edge. "I am not in the habit of being snubbed," he observed.

Moore looked around for the waiter, but could not locate him in the swirling gray smoke. He said, with a certain delicacy, "I beg your pardon. I didn't hear—"

"Ah," said the midget. "That's better. Better for you. For a copper coin I'd have slit your weasand.

The horrid little man was either drunk or mad, Moore decided. He looked for the door.

The midget laughed, and inserted liquor into the depths of the beard. "Drink up," he said menacingly, and Moore obeyed.

The drink was potent. Remarkably so. Moore felt his terror vanishing. In its place grew indignation. Was he to be bullied by a puppet—a mere bug of a man, whom he could squash with one blow?

"To hell with you," he said slowly and distinctly, and then wondered at himself. Was he trying to start a barroom brawl? Moore shuddered; he had a rather nice taste in such things, and, moreover, did not favor the idea of becoming embroiled with the beard. The very sight of the thing was loathsome. It was all tangled and woolly, and burs and dead leaves were entangled in it.

The midget's eyes snapped dangerously. "To hell with me?" he asked.

Moore nodded.

"You're not a magician?" the other asked rather doubtfully. "No? Then it's all right. A figure of speech merely. Drink with me, friend."

More liquor had surprisingly appeared. It was downed. Moore

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made the odd discovery that his spinal cord had been dissolved; in its place was a column of the fiery drink. It seemed to move up and down like the mercury in a thermometer. But the sensation was not entirely unpleasant. Smoke blew in his eyes; he coughed and stared across at the fat man with the narghile.

"Funny place," he said in an undertone.

The midget looked surprised. "What did you expect on Midsummer Eve?" he asked, and Moore couldn't quite figure out what he meant. It seemed to mean something, but—

The fat old man arose and went toward the back. He passed close to Moore's table, and, glancing aside, said in a kindly voice, "All is *Maya* —illusion." He hiccuped, drew himself up in a dignified manner, and hastily continued his journey into the smoke.

The midget nodded. "How true," he observed. "Oh, how true. All is illusion."

Moore felt in an argumentative mood. He lowered the pewter mug from his lips, smacked them slightly, and said, "Boloney."

"By that," the midget said, "I am inclined to believe that you are skeptical. But how can you be? I am a noted authority on such matters and I assure you that all is illusion."

Moore refuted the contention with a sneer. "Prove it," he snapped.

"But it's obvious, isn't it? Things are only what they seem. That's why magic is possible."

"You're drunk," Moore said insultingly.

"*I'm* drunk? By Father Poseidon and Kronos! Not for thou—not for years have I been accused of that. If you weren't drunk yourself—"

"Prove it," Moore said again, pressing home his advantage.

THE BEARD twitched indignantly. A small, gnarled brown hand emerged and pointed at Moore's pewter mug. "You think that's liquor, eh?"

Moore was rather doubtful, but he nodded anyway. The midget gleamed with satisfaction. "Then it isn't. It's water. Taste it and see."

Moore tasted. Unfortunately he was in no condition to realize whether he was drinking liquor or benzine. It did taste rather watery, but Moore wouldn't have admitted it for the world. He said it wasn't water.

"And you're a crackpot," he continued, remembering the knife and angry that he had once been afraid of the midget. "Go away before I step on you. All is illusion—ha!" He made impolite sounds.

"You believe the evidence of your senses?" the beard inquired. "Do you really think the moon is round?"

"Oh, gosh," said Moore, and drank again.

"It looks round to you," said the midget, "but does round have the same significance to everybody else? What you call round may be square to another man. How do you know how the moon looks to me?"

"If you're so interested in the moon, go away and look at it," Moore said. But the midget was persistent.

"How do you know how I look to somebody else? How do you know how you look to me? The five senses aren't arbitrarily fixed. They are illusory. All is illusion."

"Listen," said Moore, losing his temper and getting a headache, "your beard's an illusion. My hand's an illusion. I'm pulling your beard."

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He did so, vigorously. "That's illusion, too. Laugh that off."

There was tumult. The midget yelled and screamed and fought. Presently Moore fell back in his chair, clutching a tuft of curly whiskers.

"Now by Kronos and Nid!" said the midget in a soft, deadly voice. "You're going to catch hell for this, my fine fellow. If you think—*nrgh!*" The beard bristled terrifyingly. "I'll show you whether all is illusion or not!" He found a slender, short rod of polished dark wood and pointed it at Moore. "I lay on you the curse of illusion," he continued. "The blight of the five senses! I put upon you the veil of Proteus!"

Moore knocked away the wand with a wavering blow. He felt suddenly sobered. Why, he couldn't tell. But abruptly he was filled with an ardent desire to leave this smoky, insane dive. Without another word he rose and unsteadily made for the door.

The malicious laughter of the bearded midget followed him. It continued as he walked across the street, and died as he stepped upon the opposite curb. Moore turned. The tavern was gone. Only the empty lot remained.

FOR A BRIEF second Moore felt unwell. Then he realized what had happened. He was more drunk than he thought; obviously the tavern must lie several blocks away, and he had walked the distance without realizing it. Grunting, he looked at his watch.

Just eight twenty. Time for a cup of coffee before Corinne's train got in. Moore entered the depot, made his way toward the restaurant, and then, struck by a sudden thought, turned instead to the drugstore, where he purchased caffeine citrate and downed several tablets rapidly. That done, he returned to the restaurant and drank coffee. He sobered rapidly.

He sat at the counter, lost in introspection. Thus at first he did not realize that curious and amused glances were being cast at him. Presently he heard an audible sniff.

Moore looked up. The man at his left, a hulking bronzed gentleman, suppressed a grin and stared hastily down at his feet.

That was only the beginning. Moore at length realized that he was the cynosure of all eyes. Apprehensive, he furtively examined his clothing. O. K. He looked at his face in a nearby mirror, and was rather pleased than otherwise. A distinctive sort of face. Not handsome, but strong. Like Gary Cooper's. Perceiving that his thoughts were beginning to veer, Moore drank more coffee.

A loud-speaker said that the train was in. Moore paid for his potation, and, avoiding various glances, went out to the runway and waited for Corinne. He saw her at last amid the crowd, a brittle blonde with inquisitive eyes and a firm chin. She hadn't changed much. A competent, businesslike, but rather sardonic young woman. There were short, sharp cries and awkward embraces. Corinne sniffed and drew back.

"Who spilled perfume on you?" she demanded.

"Perfume?"

Corinne looked at him steadily. "I detect a strong aroma of violets about your person. Offensively strong."

"Funny," Moore said, blinking. "I don't smell it."

"Then your nose is stultified," Corinne remarked. "I could smell it on the train. Bert, I'll have to



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take you in hand. A little motherly guidance is what you need. A dash of perfume, perhaps, if you insist—but not violets. It is not done. You must have taken a bath in the stuff."

"Well," said Moore, rather at a loss, "I'm glad to see you. Want a drink?"

"Yes," Corinne told him, "very much. But not enough to accompany you into a cocktail bar. People might think that offensive odor emanated from me."

Touched to the quick, the man led his sister outside and superintended the extrication and disposal of baggage. Presently he was driving his sedan along Wilshire Boulevard, Corinne at his side. The girl had opened the window and stuck out her head. Moore grimly kept his eyes straight ahead. Corinne had changed for the worse, he decided.

CORINNE'S head re-entered the car. She touched Moore's arm.

"What's wrong with your car, Bert?" she inquired.

"Eh?" Moore depressed the accelerator and let the steering wheel play loosely. "Nothing. Why?"

"That noise."

The man listened intently. "That's the engine."

"It isn't the engine. There's a whistle—"

"*Sh-h,*" said Moore, and, after a pause, "no, it's in your ears. Must be."

Corinne eyed him steadily. Suddenly she collapsed in his lap. Moore jammed on the brake before he realized that his sister had bent forward in order to apply her ear to his chest. She straightened and eyed the man speculatively.

"That whistle," she said, "is coming out of you. You're making it. A noise like a . . . a—"

"A what?"

"A policeman. His whistle, I mean. Why don't you stop it? It doesn't amuse me."

"I'm not whistling," Moore snapped.

"You mean you can't help it?"

"I mean I'm not doing it."

"Maybe you swallowed something," Corinne said, and sighed. People acted less unexpectedly in New York. There one could foresee things. A whiff of violets blew on the girl, and she shut her eyes.

Just then a motorcycle officer appeared and motioned Moore to the curb. The man dismounted and put one foot on the running board. His mouth opened, and abruptly closed. He stared hard at the driver, his nostrils twitching slightly.

"What's the matter?" Moore asked. "I wasn't speeding."

The officer didn't answer. He peered into the car, scrutinized Corinne, and looked into the back. Finally he said, "Who's doing that whistling?"

Before Moore could speak, Corinne broke in swiftly, "It's the motor, officer. The overhead gasket valve sprang a leak. We're going now to get it fixed."

"The—overhead-gasket valve?"

"Yes," Corinne said with great firmness. "The gasket valve. The overhead one, you know."

There was a brief pause. Finally the officer scratched his head and remarked, "If I were you, I'd get it fixed as soon as you can. You're disturbing the peace."

The girl smiled sweetly. "Thank you," she returned. "We'll get it fixed. Right away. You know how those gasket-valves are."

"Yeah," said the officer, and watched the car speed away. Then he thoughtfully climbed on his motorcycle. Under his breath he in-

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quired plaintively, "Just what in hell is an overhead-gasket valve, anyway?"

CORINNE was slightly nervous by the time they arrived home. Moore owned a two-story house in a suburb. It was surrounded by a small lawn, a tree or two, and a dog. The dog was named Banjo. He was not a small dog, and this seemed to be something he could never quite realize. Banjo had once seen a Pekingese, and ever since labored under the delusion that he, too, was a lap dog. Inasmuch as part of his sinister ancestry was collie, he was exceptionally hairy, and he had managed to attain the unique distinction of being able to shed all the year round. This vast and behemothic creature came galloping around the corner of the house, saw the car, and came to an immediate decision.

Banjo had theories about automobiles. They moved; *ergo*, they were alive. And his master was now obviously a captive of one of these eerie beings. With courage worthy of a greater cause, Banjo charged forward and sank his teeth in a tire.

The tire retaliated by hissing at Banjo in a threatening manner. This completely unnerved the beast, who promptly lost his courage and fled trembling under the house, where he cowered, moaning softly.

Moore emerged from the car, cursing in a low, vicious monotone. He left the vehicle parked at the curb and conveyed Corinne and her luggage to the front door. This was opened by a skeleton who had somewhere got hold of a supply of parchment and drawn it about his crumbling bones in a rather haphazard fashion. The skeleton's surname was Peters. His Christian name, if, indeed, he had ever possessed one, was lost in the mists of decades. He was the general factotum of the Moore household, and for the last forty years had concentrated on the single purpose of growing old ungracefully. For at least twenty years he had been cheating the undertaker. Moore had a well-founded suspicion that on Peter's days off the man would make the rounds of various mortuaries and tauntingly cackle at the proprietors.

"Ha," said Peters in a rather gloating fashion, "a flat tire, hey?"

Corinne eyed the fellow intently, but he was apparently not referring to her.

Moore said, "Yeah. A flat tire. That fool dog bit it."

"I shall fix it," Peters stated, and looked at the girl. Quite suddenly the man seemed to go mad. His toothless, shrunken jaws quivered, his face, with a faint crackling, broke into a horrid grin, and he began to cackle like a hen. "Well, well," he shrilled. "Miss Corinne, as I live and breathe. What a surprise."

"How do you mean, surprise?" Moore asked coldly. "You knew she was coming."

Peters ignored this brutal attempt to throw cold water on his enthusiasm. His skeletal frame jiggled and shook with senile amusement. "Ha," he said, "it's been a long time. A long time. You've changed, Miss Corinne."

Corinne returned. "You haven't changed a bit."

The humor of this remark almost finished Peters. He commenced a bizarre dance among the luggage, wheezing and flailing his arms in mad amusement. Leaving the old fellow to his octogenarian whims, Moore escorted Corinne into an adjoining room.

SUSAN, Moore's wife, was playing solitaire in a distracted fashion. She

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was small, plumpish, and still pretty, though inclined to hysteria. Patterns, she contended, puzzled her. Practically everything comprised a pattern. Preparing food was one pattern she had mastered, but such abstruse confusion as the vacuum cleaner, the radio, and solitaire left her utterly baffled. However, she rose to the occasion and greeted Corinne with a hospitable smile.

Not until the welcome was over did Susan sniff. "Oh," she exclaimed, pleased. "Violets. For me?"

Corinne said, "Susan, I want to ask you a question. Do you hear a . . . a peculiar noise?"

Susan shook her head. "Why, no. Nothing peculiar. Why?"

"Not even a . . . a whistle?"

"Oh, of course," said Susan, beaming. "But that isn't peculiar. It's just a whistle."

Corinne closed her eyes and took a deep breath. Finally she was able to ask, "Do you know where it's coming from?"

"No. Do you?"

Moore was annoyed at the turn the conversation had been taking. He whirled as fingers snapped, with a repugnant popping noise, behind him. Peters stood beckoning on the threshold.

"Must you make that noise?" Moore asked irritably, coming over to the man. "It sounds like firecrackers."

Peters contemplated his knotted knuckles with satisfaction. "Sure does," he agreed. "I've filled the tub for you."

For a second Moore was puzzled. What tub? Then light dawned. "Oh," he said vaguely. "But I didn't ask you to fill the tub."

"I put in bath salts," Peters said enticingly. "Lots of bath salts."

"Why in Heaven's name should I take a bath now?" Moore asked.

"Because you smell," said Peters, clinching the argument.

THERE WAS company for dinner. This was due to Susan's efforts. She had always been worried about Corinne's unmarried state, and took the opportunity of inviting Steve Watson, an eligible young man, to call that night. Moore cared little for Steve, who was a fine upstanding specimen of young American manhood, with a hearty booming laugh and a penchant for mirrors.

Somebody had let Banjo into the house. When Moore came downstairs, shaved and cleansed, he was greeted by the mastodonic dog, who went into a frenzy of mad delight. The beast flung himself upon his master, nearly precipitating the startled man to the floor.

"Down, damn you," Moore said in a vicious undertone. "Go away and die. Scram."

But Banjo could not take a hint. Something seemed to have aroused the demon within his furry breast, and he pranced about Moore, sniffing with all his strength, until the man carried the dog away by main force and thrust him into the outer darkness. Banjo protested loudly.

Straightening his apparel, Moore went in to meet the others. Susan was sitting happily in a corner, beaming upon Corinne and Steve Watson, who were conversing animatedly.

"Hello, there," Steve said, rising. "What ill wind blew you in? How've you—"

There was a sudden pause. A deadly silence fell on the room. Finally Susan observed, "What a peculiar odor. We're not having fish for dinner, are we?"

Moore sniffed. He could detect nothing amiss. Corinne was eying

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her brother with a singularly incredulous expression.

"Fish?" she inquired. "For dinner? I doubt it, Susan. You wouldn't have any fish that dead."

Susan called Peters, who presently shuffled in. "Are we having fish for dinner?" she asked.

"No," Peters said firmly. "But somebody is. Not for dinner, though." He turned to stare at Moore. "You didn't take that bath, after all," he accused.

"Peters, open the windows," Susan said hastily. This was done, though it didn't help a great deal. There was an unmistakable reminder of fish in the room—very old and very dead.

Steve had recovered his aplomb. "Ill wind is right," he said, grinning and advancing on Moore. "Been long time, old man."

Moore eyed the other's extended hand distastefully. Silently he gripped it. Simultaneously Steve let out an ear-piercing yell and sprang back, shaking his hand with vigor. Oaths bubbled up in his throat, and he suppressed them only by a mighty effort. The others looked at him wonderingly.

"What on earth, Steve?" Susan asked.

"Ha, ha," Steve said, forcing his face into some semblance of a smile. "Always the joker, eh, Bert? How'd you do that? Nearly burned my fingers off." He blew on the fingers in question.

"What are you talking about?" Moore asked ill-temperedly.

Moore disliked practical jokes, and especially pointless ones. But Steve seemed determined to carry the joke to its bitter end. With a quick dive he captured Moore's hand and inspected it.

"Funny," he said after a pause. "Got wires up your sleeve, maybe?"

"Why should I have wires up my sleeve?" Moore wanted to know.

Steve looked annoyed. "Oh, very well," he said. "Suit yourself. But it wasn't very funny."

"I'm glad you realize it," Moore returned tartly, and glanced at the puzzled faces of Susan and Corinne.

Peters dragged in his shriveled frame. "Dinner's ready," he announced, and departed, mumbling something about bath salts.

THE MEAL was not an unqualified success. A seagull might have devoured it with good appetite, but seagulls have a weakness for fish, dead or otherwise. The guests were somewhat nicer about such matters. Both Susan and Corinne kept handkerchiefs firmly pressed against their quivering nostrils. Only Steve was unprotected. He ate very little and got paler and paler as time wore on.

To cap it all, a siren began screaming from some point suspiciously close at hand. Corinne, after a startled glance at her brother's stomach, shut her eyes and took a deep breath. This was a mistake, as she immediately realized. Susan, luckily, was not much perturbed by the mysterious siren. Strange noises were continually making themselves heard. And radios were a pattern she could never understand.

The unfortunate Steve, however, left early, after making an appointment to see Moore at the latter's office, the next day. At least, Steve thought it was the next day. That infernal siren kept whooping deafeningly, and he seemed almost certain that Moore was responsible for it. Steve decided that his host was going mad, or else had developed a shocking propensity for practical jokes.

Both Corinne and Susan retired early. Susan decided to sleep in the

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*The beard—or the man behind it, perhaps—repeated more firmly: "All is illusion."*

guest room with her sister-in-law, who sympathetically acceded to the woman's request. As for Peters, he was detected stealthily sprinkling lysol about Moore's bedroom. Moore told him to get the hell out and angrily disrobed. He had an incipient hangover and was trying to solve a number of mystifying problems. Either he was crazy, or the world had become so. Moreover, there was a disturbing recollection of a certain bearded midget who had threatened—what? Some curse—the curse of Proteus, wasn't it? The "blight of the five senses."

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Moore took an aspirin and went to bed. Calm settled over the house, broken only by an ear-shattering wail as of a siren in agony.

The next morning Moore took the opportunity of escaping before Susan and Corinne arose. He spoke briefly with Banjo, who was puzzled by a harsh buzzing emanating, apparently, from his master's stomach. The enticing odor of decadent fish was gone, and in its place was a strong aroma of peach blossoms, which did not appeal to the dog's rather finicky tastes. Banjo half-heartedly wrapped his tongue around Moore's extended hand, and then galloped away.

A cold shower and restaurant coffee had heartened Moore considerably, and, when he entered his law office, he went so far as to smile at the receptionist. She was a dangerously pretty brunette with bad eyes—immoral eyes, Moore sometimes felt.

"Good morning," she said cheerily. "How are you today?"

"Fine, Miss Brandon," Moore returned. "What's on the docket?"

"You have an appointment with Mr. Watson in half an hour. He telephoned—"

"Oh, yes," said Moore, remembering Steve's words of the preceding night. Chilled at the prospect of viewing the large and offensively healthy face of Mr. Watson, Moore entered his office, sank down behind his desk, and began to open his mail.

This took considerable time. Moore was brooding over certain legal papers when the dictograph buzzed, announcing Mr. Watson.

"Send him in," Moore said.

The door opened. Steve stood on the threshold, smiling in a forgive-and-forget manner. His hand quivered, ready to be extended for a hearty shake. His mouth opened, and then closed again.

"Well?" Moore asked. "Come in and sit down."

Steve did not obey. He came in, rather gingerly, but refused to seat himself. Instead, the man leaned on the desk, bent his large body over it, and peered at Moore in a disconcerting fashion.

"What's the matter now?" Moore inquired.

Steve started slightly. He looked around the office, retreated to the door, and called Miss Brandon.

"Yes?" she said, coming forward.

"You said Mr. Moore was in his office."

"Why, he is. I—"

"He's not," Steve declared firmly. "There's nothing in there but a duck."

Moore abruptly let out a string of oaths in which Steve's name figured largely.

"Listen!" Steve said. "It's quacking at me."

Miss Brandon entered the office, her eyes wide. She looked at Moore, who glared back.

"Why, so it is a duck," she exclaimed. "It must have flown in through the window."

"Ducks don't fly," Steve pointed out. "And where's Mr. Moore?"

"He must have stepped out for a minute," Miss Brandon said, still puzzled. "Would you care to wait?"

"You're fired," Moore yelped. "As for you, Steve, kindly step to hell. I'm going out and get a drink." Angrily he rose, marched between the motionless figures of Steve and Miss Brandon, and opened the door. That done, he slammed it after him and departed.

Then man and woman looked at one another uncomfortably. Steve wet his lips.

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Miss Brandon said, "The door. It opened by itself."

"Yeah," Steve said slowly. "Just before that duck reached it. There's something very funny going on around here. I don't think I'll wait for Mr. Moore. He might bring back a lion with him. Or a gorilla. Good morning, Miss Brandon."

MEANWHILE a duck waddled along the hall and paused before the elevator. It couldn't possibly have reached the buzzer, yet the button was depressed as by an invisible finger. Presently the cage arrived and the door opened. A dark-hued youth looked around wonderingly.

"Gawn *down!*" he cried.

Moore entered the elevator. He realized that the boy was staring at him with popping eyes.

The sound of harsh, vitriolic quacks resounded menacingly. Blinking, the youth closed the door, dropped the cage, and brought his passenger to the lobby.

The duck emerged from the elevator and proceeded, in a stately manner, toward the nearest bar.

Somehow Moore's thoughts kept going back to the bearded midget. Once more, he realized, curious glances were being cast at him by innumerable passers-by. What on earth was amiss? Up to last night his life had been sane and orderly, but now—

Gradually in Moore's mind began to grow a suspicion that all was not well.

He encountered considerable difficulty at the bar. The counterman would not take his order. Worse, the man ignored Moore completely, despite short, pithy demands, delivered in a voice calculated to rouse even a bartender from the depths of apathy. Finally, disgusted, Moore went to a table and sat down. Before he could collect himself, two large, jovial, and drunken gentlemen had joined him, taking chairs on each side of Moore.

"There's plenty of room," Moore said sharply. "Why sit here? This table's occupied."

The men eyed one another. One said, "Jimmy, did you hear that?"

"Yes," said Jimmy. "I heard it. And I hope I may never hear the like of it again."

"Indigestion, maybe?" the other man asked hopefully.

Jimmy shook his head. "Not me. Or you. An elephant perhaps, might emit that sound, or a . . . a—" He groped for the right word.

"A dugong?" suggested the other, trying to be helpful.

Jimmy paused to consider. "What," he asked at length, "is a dugong, Joe?"

Joe said: "It's like a seal."

Jimmy gave his companion a long, disgusted look and finally shook his head. "No," he said solemnly. "Not a dugong. Here's the waiter. I want Scotch. Two Scotches."

Seeing the waiter, Moore decided to bring matters to a head. He didn't want two drunks at his table. And it was his table. Priority of right. He demanded—

But the waiter refused to answer. He looked sharply at Joe and Jimmy and hurried away.

"That noise again," Joe said quietly, repressing his panic.

"I know," Jimmy replied. "We have got to be calm. If there's a noise, something must be making it."

"*If* there's a noise?" Joe inquired. "You know damn well there's a noise."

"All right," said Jimmy pacifyingly. "There's a noise. It—"

"Low, ordinary sots," Moore growled.

By common consent Joe and

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Jimmy looked at the chair between them. They remained perfectly quiet for some time. Eventually Joe said in a flat, toneless voice, "It's a duck."

Jimmy was disposed to argue. "How do you know it's a duck?" he demanded. "Ducks don't patronize barrooms."

"How do I know it's a duck?" Joe repeated ironically. "Just look at it. What else could it be?"

"It might be a drake," said Jimmy in a sudden burst of inspiration. This about finished Moore, who rose, and, not waiting for his liquor, fled, leaving Joe and Jimmy to argue fruitlessly about ducks and drakes.

He almost ran into Susan and Corinne, who were returning from Moore's office, having failed to find the man there.

"Well," he said, planting himself before the two women. "Hello."

Suddenly he felt himself kicked painfully in the middle. Susan let out a short, shrill scream and looked down. A duck was indulging in strange contortions at her feet.

"For Heaven's sake!" she said. "Why, the poor thing. I almost stepped on it."

Breath returned to Moore. He nearly strangled on bitter words. "Susan," he said in a muffled voice, "it isn't funny. Not a bit funny. Just what is the matter with you, anyway?"

"It's hurt," said Susan. "Listen to it quacking."

Then the woman did a horrid thing. She stooped, calmly picked up her husband, and cradled the thunderstruck man in her arms. Moore's brain cracked and toppled. He sought vainly to maintain a grip on sanity. By some incredible feat of legerdemain his wife had picked him up—a man weighing one hundred sixty pounds—and was cuddling him at the corner of Broadway and Seventh Street.

Vainly Moore tried to writhe free. "Put me down!" he almost screamed. "Damn it, Susan, stop this foolishness! Put me down before—"

"Oh," Susan murmured, "it's frightened. Poor little thing. Maybe it's hungry. What do ducks eat, Corinne?"

"I don't know," said Corinne, who had been watching the spectacle with mingled emotions. "By the looks of that duck I imagine it eats its young. Or human flesh. Watch out."

Her warning came too late. Moore, seeing a plump portion of his wife's bare arm temptingly near, had done an ungentlemanly thing. He bit it. With a cry Susan released her husband, who fell heavily to the ground.

"Beaked by a duck," Corinne said. "Are you hurt?"

"No," Susan replied, inspecting her arm. "But I must say you have an odd sense of humor, Corinne."

"So has the duck," said the girl. "Look at the horrid little creature go."

Moore was running down the street in a frantic attempt to escape his wife—a Frankenstein's monster, he thought. What on earth had got into Susan? Whence had she drawn this extraordinary burst of strength? Remembering that for fifteen years he had lived under the same roof with this Amazon, Moore shuddered and redoubled his speed.

Suddenly Steve Watson reappeared, on his way back to Moore's office fortified by a slug of rye. With typically quick thinking he took in the situation at a glace. Pelting toward him came a duck—a duck Steve had seen before. And ten feet away stood Susan ad Corinne.

Obviously this must be a tame

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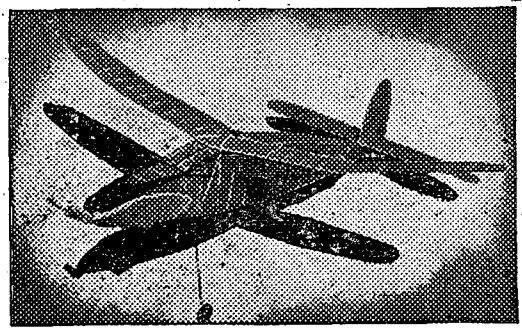

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duck—one belonging to the Moore menage. While Steve had never realized that Moore went in for raising poultry, he promptly decided that the man must have bought the fowl as a surprise for his wife. Some people do these things. Steve himself had once purchased an alligator and mailed it to a friend as a gift. Unfortunately the friend had not summoned up enough energy to punch the donor in the nose.

Steve captured the duck with a deft motion and turned toward the woman with a flashing smile. "Got him!" he said triumphantly. "I always turn up at the right time, don't I?" He marched toward Susan. "It's yours, isn't it?"

At this strategic moment the magic spell cast by the bearded midget wore off temporarily. Moore was restored to his rightful self. Steve was horrified to find himself suddenly borne down under the weight of a large, vigorous, and murderously active Bertram Moore.

Moore wasted no time on idle speculation. He was atop the prostrate Steve, and the latter was momentarily too terrified to move. It seemed a good opportunity to commit homicide, and Moore did his best, sinking his hands into Steve's throat and endeavoring to throttle the man.

Susan had recognized her husband. He had appeared somewhat suddenly, it was true, but she decided Bertram must have sprung from a convenient window and hurled himself upon Steve in a mad fit of jealousy. Uttering remonstrances, she rushed forward and tried to pull her husband off his strangling victim.

"Go away," Moore said over his shoulder. "I'll be through here in a minute."

A warning whistle came from Corinne. "Scram!" she said urgently. "The Cossacks!"

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A bulky, uniformed figure pushed itself through the gathering crowd. Moore felt himself lifted from the prone and gasping Steve. More policemen arrived.

"You," said the first officer, "had better come along with me."

Someone in the crowd indicated Susan. "She was helping him."

Susan was captured. Steve, likewise, was taken into custody. Corinne, feeling slightly insane, tried to help by tugging at the first officer's arm.

"You don't want to arrest them," she urged, smiling seductively. "They're friends of mine. They were just . . . er . . . fooling."

"Oh," said the policeman, "friends of yours, eh? Didn't I hear you call me a Cossack? Judge Sturm will be glad to see you."

JUDGE HORATIO STURM sat on the bench and eyed his fingernails. An impeccable man, Judge Sturm. His dapper, lean figure, clad in the best of taste, had graced the bench for years, and his bland, lean face, with its deceptive smile, had looked upon many malefactors and felons. Now it looked upon four new ones with no great approval.

"Good morning," he said. "What can I do for you?"

"Disturbing the peace is the charge, your honor," said the arresting officer. Judge Sturm lifted a chiding finger.

"Tut, tut," he remonstrated. "Must we make the conversation sordid? Can't we simply have a pleasant little chat? One must improve the shining hour. After all, we won't be seeing these four felons again for a long time. A long, long time," he repeated somewhat gloatingly.

"Your honor," Steve said in a straightforward way, "I was attacked. I—"

Judge Sturm lifted amazed eyebrows. "You? Incredible. Now if it had been either of these two charming young ladies, I might be willing to believe it. Do you mean one of them attacked you? Or both, perhaps?"

"No, your honor," Steve said, blinking at the astonishing judge. "He did. This man here."

Judge Sturm turned interested eyes upon Moore. "You were the attacker? As an attorney, Mr. Moore, you should know the results of such an act. It was only last week you were defending a client of yours for assault and battery."

"I had justification," Moore said. "He . . . he picked me up—"

"That's a lie," Steve snapped. "I picked up a duck."

Judge Sturm blinked. He carefully scrutinized his fingernails and then looked again at the four before the bench. "I beg your pardon," he said gently. "My hearing may be somewhat impaired. No doubt from listening to a great many lying stories." The judge paused meaningly. "Are you implying that you mistook Mr. Moore for a duck, or vice versa?"

Susan suddenly decided to clarify matters. "He jumped out of a window," she said helpfully.

The judge started. He bent a probing gaze on Susan. "You are ambiguous," he pointed out. "Your antecedent is doubtful. There are three persons involved in this mystery: Mr. Moore, the other gentleman who was assaulted, and the duck. Do you mean to state that one of them jumped out of a window? If so, which?"

"Bertram," said Susan. "My husband. Mr. Moore."

Judge Sturm pondered. "What

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window was this?" he finally asked.

Susan spread her hands in a baffled manner. "I don't know," she said. "I didn't see him. One minute he wasn't there, and the next there he was."

The judge drew a deep breath and turned to Corinne. "Young lady," he said, "as yet I have heard nothing from you. You may be the only sane member of this quartet. Would you mind giving me your version of this disreputable affair?"

Corinne licked her lips. She was feeling none too well. She was longing for the peace and quiet of Times Square and the subway. But she pulled herself together and said rapidly:

"Well, Mrs. Moore and I were walking along Broadway when she stepped on a duck. She picked it up and it bit her. Then Mr. Watson came along and picked up the duck. It had got away—"

"Stop!" the judge said hastily. "That's enough. More than enough. Horgan, was it really necessary to arrest these people?"

"I know my duty, your honor," Horgan said stolidly.

AT THIS POINT Moore decided matters had gone too far. He stepped forward and spoke quietly to Judge Sturm.

"Let me explain this, your honor," he said. "It's quite simple, really. I'm at fault. I admit it. I lost my temper. None of the others is responsible."

"That's better," said the judge, with some satisfaction. "Apparently you're still sane. Why did you lose your temper? Do you still contend that this man picked you up?"

"Well," Moore explained, "that wasn't really what started it. My wife started it when she picked me up."

Judge Sturm strangled on an incipient cough. He seized his gavel, considered it thoughtfully, and murmured, "You may step back, Mr. Moore. Far back. I don't want you near me. My reputation might suffer. Do you seriously mean to suggest that this young lady—your wife, I presume—actually— No, I don't want to say it."

For the moment the judge's gaze had been intent on Susan. Slowly his eyes swiveled to the left. There they remained fixed, a dim glaze creeping over them. The man suddenly looked haggard and old.

"Horgan," he said softly, "where is Mr. Moore?"

"Mr. Moore, your honor? Why, right here."

"No, Horgan," the judge whispered. "Mr. Moore is no longer with us. He has either substituted a goat in his place by some piece of legerdemain, or he has been transformed into a goat. In any event, there is now a goat in this courtroom."

"Your honor!" Moore said indignantly. "I protest! I refuse to be made the butt of practical jokes."

"Now it's bleating at me," Judge Sturm said very quietly. "Just listen to the thing."

"Goats don't bleat, your honor," Horgan put it. "Sheep bleat."

The judge looked long and fixedly at Horgan, who began to sweat. At length Judge Sturm rose and began to make preparations to depart.

"Your honor!" Horgan said, shocked. "You're not leaving?"

"Yes. I'm leaving. Have you any objection?"

"But the prisoners," said Horgan, roused to desperation.

"Horgan," the judge observed in a kindly voice, "you heard Mr. Moore admit his culpability. He said that he alone was responsible. Now Mr. Moore has apparently been

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transformed into a goat. I fine him ten dollars and costs. You, Horgan, may collect it."

Wavering slightly, Judge Sturm retired to his chambers, where he drank long and thirstily from a brown bottle. He tried no more cases that day, which was probably lucky for the defendants.

Meanwhile Moore, muttering curses, approached Horgan and tried to give him ten dollars. But the officer seemed reluctant to accept the money. He made pushing gestures with his hands.

"Go away," he said. "*Shoo!*"

By the time Moore had decided to give up the vain effort, he saw that Susan, Corinne, and Steve had left the court. Dejectedly he followed them. Emerging from the city hall, he suddenly realized that only a block away lay the Union Depot.

Some unexplainable impulse drew him there. Passers-by gave him a wide berth, and Moore felt strangely lonely. He kept a wary eye alert for policemen, but, luckily, encountered none.

There was the Union Depot. Moore wandered toward the vacant lot across the street. Had the dome-shaped tavern ever really been here? But that, of course, was impossible.

A BALL of tumbleweed rolling through the grass stopped at Moore's feet. A pair of twinkling, malicious eyes surveyed the man. There was something extraordinarily familiar about the matted tangle of curly whiteness. And when a gnarled brown hand emerged, Moore felt certain of it.

"You make a lousy-looking goat," observed the midget. "Mangy, I'd say. What about illusion now?"

Moore felt vaguely nauseated. The hot sunlight made him dizzy. This couldn't be real.

"Well?" the midget asked. "Was I right or not?"

"Yes," Moore said slowly. "You were right. Or else I'm quite mad."

"Oh, you're not mad. It's just magic. The spell of illusion. The veil of Proteus. I'm a bit of a magician, in my way."

"Can . . . can you take away the curse?" Moore asked involuntarily.

"Sure. I don't want to be too hard on you. Just wanted to teach you a lesson. Here," said the midget, extending a small crystal vial. "Just drink this. No, no, not yet. Wait till you've regained your rightful form. That's *elixir potentis*. Just gulp that down and you'll be O. K."

Moore took the flask. "Uh—thanks," he said.

"That's all right. But be careful, whatever you do. If you drank the

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elixir now, you'd remain in goat form for the rest of your life. The elixir doesn't change you, it just *fixes* you in the particular form you're wearing at the moment. Be sure you look like a man to others before you uncork that bottle. You have to be careful when you play around with—illusion."

The last word sighed out like a whisper of the breeze. The midget was gone. Only a ball of tumbleweed rolled across the empty lot.

Moore stood silently looking at the vial in his hand. Presently he pocketed it and turned away. He'd have to wait, now, till he regained his own form. But when would that be?

Somehow Moore reached his home. Banjo seemed terrified at sight of his master and fled howling. Quietly Moore went around to the back door and let himself into the kitchen.

There Peters greeted him. The oldster's withered face was impassive, but Moore knew the man would look with equal stoicism upon a human, a goat, or a whale. There was only one way to make sure.

"Hello, Peters," he said tentatively. "My wife home yet?"

"Oh, yes," Peters responded. "She's mixing a drink for herself. Miss Corinne's leaving. She's going back to New York. Too bad she couldn't stay longer."

Moore felt a wave of relief. He gripped Peters' arm.

"Do I look all right to you? I mean—like myself?"

Peters confirmed Moore's resemblance to himself and took his departure. With a heartfelt sigh of relief Moore extracted the vial from his pocket and uncorked it.

"Bertram!" came Susan's voice from the front of the house. "Is that you?"

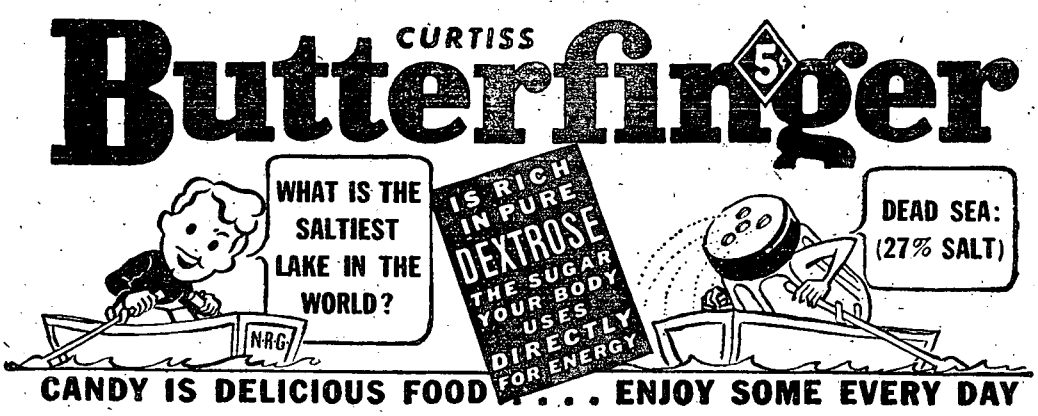
Moore hesitated. Then he swiftly downed the contents of the flask, dropped it under the sink, and turned toward the door.

It opened suddenly and Susan came in. She paused on the threshold. The glass in her hand dropped to shatter on the floor.

"It's just me," Moore said, smiling. "Did I frighten you?"

But Susan wasn't listening. She turned and ran away. From the hall her voice came echoing back to Moore's ears.

"Peters, Corinne! Help!" the woman cried shrilly. "Call the police! There's a horse in the kitchen!"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# HE SHUTTLES

by THEODORE STURGEON

**A very logical—and very unpleasant—little story based on the old fairy tale. He had three wishes. He was very clever. He would escape all penalties—**

Illustrated by Flessel

*"Why are you sitting here alone in this little room?" asked the man.*

*"I am not alone any more, because you have come," I told him. He had not been there an hour ago, or a minute ago either, but I was not surprised. That was because it was this man, and no other.*

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*"Why are you sitting here, looking at a white sheet of paper in your typewriter, pulling your ear with one hand and that fuzzy hair with the other?" he asked.*

*"I am doing it because I am a person who writes stories for other people to read," I said. "But I am not writing now because I can't think of anything to write about. That makes me unhappy and so I pull my ear and my hair. It isn't fuzzy."*

*"It is fuzzy." The man looked at me for a little while. "Are the stories you write true?"*

*"No," I said. "I have never written a story that was true. People don't like to read things that are true. They only like things that might be true. One must be very clever to write a story that is true and make it seem as if it might be true. I am not very clever, so I must rely on my imagination."*

*"Oh," he said, as if he understood me, which was surprising because I'm sure I didn't know what I was talking about.*

*"I will tell you a story," he said. "But it is a true story, and must be believed. If I tell you the story, will you believe it?"*

*"If it is a good story, I don't care whether it is true or not," I said. "If credence is the price I must pay, I pay it gladly." I set my margin, lit a cigarette and looked at him.*

*He said again, "The story is true." And he began to speak. This is what he said:*

I WAS GOING about the world doing my duty, when my attention was called to a man named MacIlhainy Tobin, whose conceit was phenomenal. It was unfortunate and incurable, because it was quite justified. He was indeed a superior person. He did not need my help, because his wits were so very sharp; but when I offered it he took advantage of it, for he was one of those who never miss an opportunity for gain. I did not offer him gain, but neither had those of whom he had taken advantage in the past. He felt that he could twist whatever circumstance crossed his path into something of value for him. And in this instance he was misled purely because he had no precedent to follow that involved failure.

He was alone in his great study, thinking of the things he had done and been which proved his superiority. "I am a man," he said, "who has never made a mistake."

"That is not true," I said to him. "Perfection is an unnatural thing, and against laws that cannot be broken. You exist, and your are perfect. That is your mistake.

He looked over his plainlike desk at me.

"I have never seen you before, sir," he said cordially. "I did not see you come into my room or sit opposite me, but I am not startled. You are welcome."

"Thank you," I said. "I startle nobody. You are proud of yourself?"

"Yes," he said, and smiled. He was a magnificent man, with a great square jaw and large gray eyes. His hair was like burnished platinum, and the lamplight delighted in leaping from it. "I have everything I want, including the desire for things which I may not have. I am complete, and in flux, and therefore greatly contented with myself."

"You have been ruthless," I said.

He smiled and spread his hands. "I have been logical."

"You have paid the penalties for all you have done?"

"Yes. One must. That, too, is logical."

"Are you proud of that, then?"

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No one may be angry toward me, but if it had been possible, he would have been furious. "That is my one shame," he said softly. "That in the reasonable course of events, even such as I must bow to circumstance. I regret that there are powers beyond my control. My ego is as well-ordered and methodical as it can possibly be, and yet I am forced to turn aside from the creations of fools whose stupidity has led them to believe that their lives are for purposes which cannot benefit me."

"You are ashamed of being human, then. No human can achieve divinity and stay human—without my help."

He raised his silver eyebrows. "What is divinity?"

"Complete satisfaction. I ask you, then: Granting that, what is divinity?"

He stared at his hands. "For me, it would be . . . it would be power. Complete control over all the Universe. If I could receive the homage from all things, past, present and future, living and unliving and dead, that I get now from my own ego, then I would be completely satisfied."

"Do you want that, then?"

He was silent for a long while, thinking. "No!" he said suddenly. "It would be *ne plus ultra*. Could I not fight fools, I could no longer be contented with myself, for my successes. I have more powers now than those you offer me; for if everything were possible to me, I would lose all urges. That loss I cannot afford. What powers have you?"

"I have none," I told him, "except the ability to give powers. These must be of your choice."

"Wishes, then?"

I nodded. "Three wishes—and they will be true to the letter."

"I have heard of the things you have done," he said. "You are a legend in many lands. Why have you invariably given three wishes to fools?"

"I have never met any others."

He laughed uproariously. "Even for such as you," he said, wiping his eyes, "there must be new experiences. You are about to have one. You will grant me three wishes, and find out that I am not a fool. You may even find out a thing or two about yourself."

"I am not a personality, but an instrument," I told MacIlhainy Tobin. "I can no more find out anything about myself than can that beautiful paper knife discover that it was stolen from the British Museum. I have my function and I perform it."

"What is your source, then? For whom do you do your work?"

"That is beyond my ability to question. Perhaps I, too, am a stolen instrument—and perhaps again I am that source. You are fumbling with the unknowable. It is not like you to fumble."

"*Touché*. Will you give me time to consider my wishes?"

"The wishes are yours, to use as you please, when you please. I will be ready when you are." I left him then. He sat for a long while looking at the empty chair across that great desk. Then he laughed and went to bed.

MacIlhainy Tobin was an extremely well-disciplined man. He did not let my visit interfere with his daily life. He ran his great corporations and held his conferences and played his excellent golf, just as usual. But all the while he thought. He thought of the power that was his for the asking, and the homage. Often he thought of himself, and of what a power he was in the world.



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Sometimes he thought of me, and wondered frankly if my coming was a reward, or a test, or a punishment.

He spent long hours over his books, and he bought more and more books. He read legends and histories and fairy tales, and learned what others had done with my three wishes. Sometimes he laughed richly, and sometimes he frowned and bit his lip.

There were those who did not seem to be fools, and yet they were all made unhappy by the wishes, ultimately. They were returned, by their impulsiveness, to their original states, or they asked for things that were too great for them to handle, and went mad. There were a few who were philosophic, and said that now they would be happy to cultivate their own gardens. There did not seem to be any malice in the fulfillment of my three wishes. Each was given exactly the things for which he asked. And yet, without exception, each had been hurt, usually quite terribly, by the power I had given.

When MacIlhainy Tobin thought of this, he would pull his lip and scowl. And he made up his mind to outwit me. That was hardly just, I thought; for it was his power, not mine. He would have to outwit himself, then, not me. It would be interesting to see if his wits were sharp enough for that task. No one had ever done it before. I bore him no malice, I think because I can bear none toward anyone.

It was two years before MacIlhainy Tobin was ready for me, and in that time he had formulated thousands of wishes, and rejected thousands. I knew he was ready because he had begun to suffer.

"May I talk with you before I state my wishes?" he asked me when he saw me again.

"Certainly."

"When you grant me a wish, is it a complete thing? For example, should I wish to be a bird, would I be a bird exactly like other birds, or would I differ?"

I smiled. "MacIlhainy Tobin, you are the first man who has ever asked me that question. No, you would differ, for there is that about you, and about all men, which is beyond us, you and I. There is a small part of you which is completely you, and yet different. It can observe, and feel, but only in terms of you as you are now. It has no will; it cannot control you or any part of you. It is something that you have built yourself, something that neither of us can touch or change or destroy. That, no matter what you wish to be, you must carry with you."

"I expected that. A soul, eh?"

"I don't know. I know nothing of that. I can grant your wishes. If one of them is that you know—"

He shook his head. "I'd rather not."

"You are indeed an amazing man, MacIlhainy Tobin."

"Yes. Tell me, may I postpone one, or two, or all, of these wishes?"

"Of course; they belong to you."

"And may I have them consecutively, the fulfillment of the second to begin after the completion of the first?"

"Yes." A cautious man, this.

He sat silent for a moment, his eyes glittering. "How can a man avoid paying the penalties for his acts?" he asked me suddenly.

"By dying—"

"Ah," he said. "Very well, I am ready to state my wishes."

I waited.

"First, from the time I awake tomorrow morning until the time I go to sleep tomorrow night, I want complete obedience from my fellow

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men, complete dominance of my will over theirs."

"Granted."

"Second, I want complete freedom from penalties of any and all kinds for my acts during that time."

"You are indeed an extraordinary man, MacIlhainy Tobin. You want death, then?"

"By no means," he chuckled. "You see, tomorrow I shall be careful to do something that carries a penalty of death." He laughed softly.

"You consider that a master stroke. You have exhausted only two wishes, and yet have what others would have required dozens to cover. You may have riches, authority, worship, invulnerability, revenge—anything you desire. Remarkable. Why do you limit yourself to one day?"

"Because I can plan one day. To plan more than that in minute detail would leave me open to a possible shift in circumstances. With what I can do in one day, I'll have all I can ever want, in every way."

"But suppose you live only a week or two after tomorrow; have you thought of that?"

"Yes. Is my second wish granted?"

"Granted. The third?"

"Postponement of the third."

"Ah—you wish to be deprived of the power to make that third wish? Until when?"

"Until I begin the day after tomorrow."

"Perfect. If you find it advantageous to return to your present state, or to continue your powers, or your life indefinitely, you will be able to. May I congratulate you?"

The slight inclination of his massive head was acceptance. "May I ask one more question?"

"Of course."

"I know that I shall be free of penalties tomorrow. But how will this be done?"

"If you do something to include death as one of your penalties, then your freedom must be arranged in the only other way possible."

"And that is—"

"I do not know. All I can do is give you your wishes."

"Very well. Good-by," MacIlhainy Tobin said to the empty room.

TOBIN awoke vastly refreshed. It had been a pleasant evening, he thought, and he rather admired himself for sleeping so well after it. Today, then, was his day.

Landis was stepping softly about, opening the drapes to the early morning sun. He picked up a tray and brought it to Tobin's huge bed.

"Six o'clock, sir." Landis stood and moved as if the ramrod up his back were woven of barbed wire. The only detectable line of demarcation between his chin and his neck was his faultless little tie, all of which by no means detracted from his excellence as a butler-valet.

"Ah—Landis. Good." Tobin watched the man's deft hands blend three coffees in the silver-bound eggshell cup. "Has Synthetic Rubber moved?"

"According to the wire service, sir, it will advance one and seven eighths at opening this morning. Mr. Krill, of Schambers Brokerage, gave the wrong information."

"Splendid. I shall deal with Mr. Krill." Tobin brooked no interference on the part of any of the string of brokers who were forced to report all overnight orders to him. "Anything else?"

"The German army opened a new offensive during the night. Three more ships have been sunk. The president has suggested, off the rec-

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*"You see the truck?" said Tobin, not looking at the little man. "You will go and lie down under it and wait for it to move." The little man walked away—*

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ord, another special session of Congress. In Tokyo—"

"Never mind all that. Today I shall be occupied with more personal matters. How's the Groot situation?"

"Mr. Groot was found dead an hour ago, sir. Suicide."

Tobin clucked happily. "What a pity. I shall have to take over his holdings. Anything else?"

"That is all, sir."

"Er—Landis—you hate my guts, don't you?"

The butler recoiled. "Why, sir—"

"Tell the truth." Tobin's voice was very soft.

"I do. You're the most cold-blooded scoundrel in creation. I've met many sharks since I have worked for you, but you're the granddaddy of them all."

Tobin laughed easily. "That will do, Landis. You will forget this incident. Is my bath ready?"

"Your bath is ready, sir," said Landis, as if no one had previously mentioned a bath.

"Good. Get out of here."

"Very good, sir."

Tobin lay back on the pillow and chuckled. It worked, then. Had he not the power to demand the truth and get it, Landis could never have brought himself to such an admission. Nor could he have forgotten it that way. He would have taken his dignity and his morning coat away forever; Tobin knew him. Still smiling, he went and luxuriated in his tub.

He chose a soft gray suit of radical cut—he could wear those seamless shoulders and still look broad and powerful. A light gray shirt. And as he remembered that he had some murdering to do today, he chose a deep purple tie, which somehow suited the occasion—crêpe soles, of course; they would come in handy. Homburg, the stained bamboo cane; a ring to match his tie; ah, splendid.

"The town car, sir?" asked Landis.

"I'll walk." He strode out of the house, leaving his butler shocked and shaken at such a radical departure from habit. He must remember to have Landis recall his pretty speech of the morning; the fool would probably drop dead.

He walked to the corner and stood there waiting for the light to change, enjoying the morning air. A round-shouldered youth touched his arm.

"Mister, you look like Wall Street to me—"

Tobin regarded him frigidly.

"As a fellow investor, I want to tell you that Bowery Flophouse is up five points, McGinnis' hash joint is up two blocks, an' I'm up a tree. Situation shaky. How's about a couple dimes? You won't feel it, an' it'll make me feel richer'n you look."

Tobin laughed and clapped him on the shoulder. "As I live and breathe, a panhandler with originality!" He looked the threadbare creature over curiously. Might as well get it over with; this trash would be as good as any. "You can do something for me."

"Sure, boss. Sure. Name it an' it's yours."

Tobin knew that. "Look! See that big tractor-trailer job that just pulled up for the light? Get underneath it; lie down with your chest up against a tire. Go ahead; now."

The youth's eyes glazed a little, and he went off to do what he was told. Tobin walked on casually, glad to have the killing off his mind. "His life for mine; it's rather a pity. I might have found someone more worthy."

A shrill scream behind him did nothing to his steady pace. Horror and shame were penalties—and today he paid none.

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Curiosity, though, did what shame could not. It would be a confounded nuisance if the boy bungled the job. He stopped and turned. The crowd he expected was milling around the truck; and then he saw a policeman, supporting the reeling panhandler. The boy was fighting to go back to the truck; strong hands kept him away. Of course! Some idiot had seen him, pulled him out in time. Rage surged through Tobin; rage, and hatred of anyone foolish enough to interfere with MacIlhainy Tobin. He snapped himself into line quickly, though. He had all day. He turned and went again toward his offices.

*"Good heavens!" I said, letting my fingers slip off the keys. "Must you go about the world making it possible for people to do that sort of thing?"*

*"Must you write stories?" asked the man.*

*"Well—to keep on living. But you—"*

*"Just," he nodded, "to remain extant."*

*"But what's the differ— Oh, I—see. Will you have some wine?"*

*"Thank you."*

*He extended a small crystal cup and it touched my arm and was full. There was a . . . a pale spot on my arm—*

*"Please go on," I said.*

"SYKES!" Tobin boomed as he strode into his office suite.

"Yes, sir."

Sykes would be a little annoying, Tobin realized, for he would be precisely the same under stress of Tobin's new and absolute command as he was at any other time.

"Get in touch with every available holder of a seat in the Stock Exchange. Have them all here at ten o'clock. Miss Twigg! Have papers drawn up for each of the men that Sykes brings in, signing over to me complete ownership of ninety percent of their properties, holdings, and interests, corporative or private. Miss Allen, I want Krill here immediately. Farrel! Sykes, where the devil is Farrel? Three minutes late? When he comes in, fire him. After seven years with me he should know better. Miss Betteredge, read my mail, except the personals. Miss Willis, read the personals. Philip, drop the profits on 227, 89 and 812, and put them all in Synthetic Rubber. It's good for two points today. I'm riding it. Give it a number. Sykes! Damn it, where's— Oh. I don't want to see anyone but Krill. If Thurston and Greenblatt phone, tell them no. Farrel! Where— That's right, Sykes. Thanks. Promote Goober, but give him ten dollars a week less than Farrel was getting. Get out of the way." And, smoothly as ever, the day was begun.

Once in his office, Tobin shrugged out of his coat and threw off his hat. Both were caught expertly before they reached the nub-piled carpet, by the omnipresent Sykes. "Anything else, sir?"

"Yes. Go to hell. Wait a minute! Don't take me so seriously, man! Get busy on those property transfers. You're about to be working for the richest man in creation. *Move,* now!"

The communicator gave its discreet whisper.

"Well?"

"There are seven hundred and twelve members of the Stock Exchange on the way to the auditorium. The rest are either unavailable or refuse to come unless they have more information."

"Refuse? Refuse? Tell them that if they don't get here immediately the whole financial world is going to

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smash—really smash, this time. Tell them I will give all the details when they get here. That'll scare them. They know me."

"Yes, Mr. Tobin. Mr. Krill is waiting."

"Krill, eh? Send him right in."

The broker was a slender man with a wide forehead and a little pointed chin. He was pale—his face, his eyes, his hands. He came straight across the room and put his hands on Tobin's desk.

"All right, Tobin. I can take it. You have too many noses scattered around. I knew you'd smell me out."

"Why did you quote the wrong price on Synthetic, then?"

"I'd tell you, and it would make some difference to you if you were human."

"Unfortunately, Krill, I'm not particularly human today," Tobin said, and smiled. "Tell me, anyway."

"I've had my eye on Synthetic Rubber for quite a while. I didn't know you controlled it, or I wouldn't have touched it. I got a tip and put every cent of capital of the United Charities into it. Dozens of organizations whose business is caring for poor, sick and old people. I've done wonders for United in the time I've handled their investments. I didn't think your man would be interested in the stock, or the fact that I would jump it. I thought I could get out with a decent profit this morning before you were interested. I quoted a lower price on it on the slim chance that you'd have the information from no one else. I lost. If I try to sell now, I'll be delayed until you dump; I know that. And you can afford to keep the price down until I must let those shares go. What are you going to do?"

"You had no business giving me false information." Tobin flicked a switch.

"Yes, sir?" said the communicator.

"Dump Synthetic."

"Yes, sir."

Krill stood quite still. "Eighty thousand people—sick people, Tobin, and kids—are going to suffer because you did that. My mistake for hoping."

"Are you going to kill yourself now, Krill?" Tobin asked conversationally.

"Wh—"

"Tell me!"

"What else can I do?"

"Krill, there's something I tried to do this morning that didn't work out. I'll have to try again. It might as well be you. Never let it be said I wouldn't help out a man in a jam.

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Krill, I don't want you cluttering up my office. Go out into the waiting room and die. Go on!"

Krill looked at him strangely and his lips writhed. He closed the door very gently behind him.

Tobin drew interlocking circles on his scratch pad for a few minutes. The communicator buzzed.

"Yes?"

"Mr. Tobin! Mr. Krill just collapsed in the waiting room!"

"*Tsk, tsk!* Will he be all right?"

"He's—dead, Mr. Tobin."

He snapped off the instrument and laughed to himself. Ah, well. He was not the first man who had cheated death by giving the old fellow another customer.

"Sykes!"

The secretary popped up like a neat little jack-in-the-box.

"Mr. Tobin. I . . . I couldn't help hearing what you said to Mr. Krill. It . . . it's uncanny—" He mopped his rabbit-face. "You told him, and . . . and he— My goodness!"

This was annoying. "Sykes, you heard nothing, remember, nothing of this affair. Understand?"

Sykes said blankly: "You called me, Mr. Tobin?"

Tobin nodded, more to himself than to Sykes. "How many of the Exchange members are here?"

"Eleven hundred odd, sir. That's about all we can expect, I'm afraid. The rest are out of reach or willing to chance not coming."

"Hm-m-m. Get whoever is drawing up those property transfers and change 'ninety percent' to 'one hundred percent' on all those to be signed by holdouts. The fools— In the meantime, get all of them on the phone—a conference line. I'll talk to them all at once."

"Yes, sir."

"Then go down to the auditorium and tell those who have come to take it easy and keep quiet until I get there."

LEFT ALONE again, Tobin beamed upon himself. Things were going fine. He'd have everything finished by two this afternoon at this rate, and then he'd have the whole evening to him. There ought to be a great many amusing things to do. The phone rang.

"Conference call, sir."

"How many are on the line?"

"Six hundred and twenty-four, sir."

"Good. That will be enough. Put 'em on."

The connection was made. "Hello —MacIlhainy Tobin, New York. I want each of you to give me absolute attention. Do not hang up.

"Each and every one of you will have drawn up a document signing over to me all your holdings, private possessions, interests and enterprises. Everything you own, in whole or in part. No loopholes; I want ironclad documents. I want them signed, witnessed, and in the mail before twenty-four hours from the present time. There is no need for me to persuade or threaten you; you will do as I say because you want to and because you must. You will let no one stop you, or change your documents in any way. Those of you who wish may apply for positions in my organization. Remuneration will be on a merit basis. That is all. Drop everything and attend to this immediately."

He hung up and signaled the switchboard. "Put me on the annunciator in the auditorium."

Over the loud speaker Tobin repeated his message. More than a thousand men left quietly and went back to their offices and homes—to figure, to phone, to dispossess themselves.

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"I'd no idea it would be as easy as that," Tobin muttered happily. "Let's see—there are about one hundred and thirty men who did not get my message. That means I have well over seventeen hundred seats in the Exchange. Enough, I think, to whittle down the objectors. Sykes!"

"Mr. Tobin?"

"We are about to be swamped with highly valuable mail. Double the office force and have a plan prepared for unifying the industries that have been signed over to me. Get it ready as soon as possible. Two weeks should be sufficient. Sykes, this firm is going places— See that those papers are delivered."

Well, that was that. Tobin had an organization strong enough to beat down any resistance, and had the best business minds obtainable working for him. He owned the financial structure of the United States and had a strangle hold on the world. That should be enough to keep him pleasantly occupied for the next ten thousand years or so. That third wish— Tomorrow he would wish for a lifetime that could be ended only by his own hand. That ought to do it. It still left him an out— He had time for a final decision on that, too. He must phrase it to exclude illness; he was not a young man any longer. Never mind; it could be slept on.

He called it a day at three o'clock and left Sykes to clean up the details.

AGAIN MacIlhainy Tobin refused a car and left Sykes even more surprised than Landis had been. He wandered about casually, peering around, looking for something really amusing to do. A cafeteria seemed a good place; he went in and had a cup of coffee. He hated cafeteria coffee, but today—everything was different. Even his sense of taste could not be penalized by the bellywash.

He spread a late paper out and turned the pages restlessly. A small item on an inside page caught his eye. "Rudolph Krill, broker—Tobin Building—heart failure—" Tobin chuckled. That wouldn't be on the inside pages tomorrow. Not when United Charities got wind of the facts. Quite a joke, that. Heart failure. Why, Krill—

The smile froze on his broad face. Heart failure? Since when was that a punishable offense—for a second party? It was, of course, suicide. Krill had willed himself to death. But—that wasn't murder.

Tobin stood up and sent his cup crashing to the floor. He stalked past the startled cashier, who managed to enunciate: "Ch-check, please—"

"Be quiet!" Tobin said, without turning his head, and kept on moving. This wouldn't do at all. He had to murder someone, or pay the price of his freedom from punishment.

Whose idea was this death penalty for murder, anyway? Blessed civilization. Tobin snorted. If you killed a man cleverly enough to outwit society, there was no penalty. Society killed without penalty. Armies— Tobin was furious. He thought he had freed himself from the stupidity of mankind for good and all. And now, even with his superhuman power, he had to stoop to the level of man—kowtow to idiocy. He must murder someone so clumsily that it must be detected and traced to him, immediately. He walked a little faster. Time was short. He'd wasted hours—

Opportunity, from force of habit, presented itself to him. A busy street corner, a taxi cutting across traffic to make a turn, a man standing just off the curb—

Tobin pushed him. This was not like the morning. This time the tires

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were moving, and moving fast. This time they drew blood, chewed on bones and bits of cloth. In the split second of horror before the crowd began to chatter, Tobin saw that he had done it this time. The man was dead. You couldn't cut an angleworm up that way and expect it to live.

A policeman had his notebook out, was taking names, details. Tobin stepped up and touched him on the soulder. "I did it, officer. I pushed him."

The policeman pushed his hat back on his head and stared at him. "Yeah. Me, too. Fifty people see him try to run across and get hit, an' you pushed him. Better go home and sleep it off, buddy. Move on; I got things to do." He turned away.

A little dazed, Tobin was three blocks away before he realized he could have forced that policeman to believe him. He was halfway back to the crowded corner before he realized that then the policeman would have to take him in for questioning. An arrest was a penalty; something would happen to stop it! He was—invulnerable.

TOBIN LEANED wearily against a lamp-post and tried to think. Every murderer made fatal mistakes; evidently he was no exception. He knew it now. No matter what he did, who he killed or how, something would happen to save him from blame. There must be a way out!

He'd try again. He had to keep trying until he managed to commit an indisputable murder.

At the next corner another policeman was directing traffic. Tobin walked over to him and took the man's gun. The officer never missed it because of a rending crash at the far corner. A sedan and a coupé—The man ran away and left Tobin with the gun. He wouldn't miss it until Tobin was well out of sight; that was certain. Tobin followed him and helped himself to bullets. No one noticed—

He picked a busy corner and a likely-looking victim, a young man with a brief case. Tobin fired four times at twenty feet. The man screamed and fell, clawing at his chest. People ran toward him, gabbling. Some idiot collided violently with Tobin, sent the gun flying yards away. Another man picked it up—Why go into details? The police came and took the man away. No one had seen Tobin fire. The murdered man had screamed, and people had seen him fall. Tobin was left in the crowd while the Black Maria and the ambulance wailed away with their unoffending cargoes.

It was a new and different Tobin who found his way into a small park and sat heavily on a bench. The cocky air was gone, and the breezy smile, and the lift from the shoulders. MacIlhainy Tobin could not know fear today, but his was bewilderment.

For the first time he noticed the shabby figure beside him. They recognized each other at the same time. The boy sprang to his feet.

"You! Who—what are you, anyway? You're the guy made me lie down under that truck this mornin'. I oughta—" He clutched the bench and weaved a little on his feet. Pickings apparently had not been so good. "Joke, I guess—Hell of a price you tried to make me pay to save yourself a couple nickels—" He walked off, trying to keep his head up.

Tobin watched him go. It never occurred to him that a dollar now would save a life. "Hell of a price—" The words said themselves over and over in his tired brain. The price of

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lying down under that truck was—death.

Tobin sat there and laughed. He roared. Murder wasn't the only thing carrying a death penalty. There was—suicide!

Where, then? When? Some place where no one would bother him, and some means that couldn't fail? Poison? He'd throw it off. Ropes broke; guns missed fire. Gas wasn't certain. Knives broke or missed vital spots.

He finally faced it like the man he was. He couldn't kill himself because he couldn't be killed. He'd keep fighting until he won, or lost—he had never lost before— Ah, well. He hailed a cab and went home.

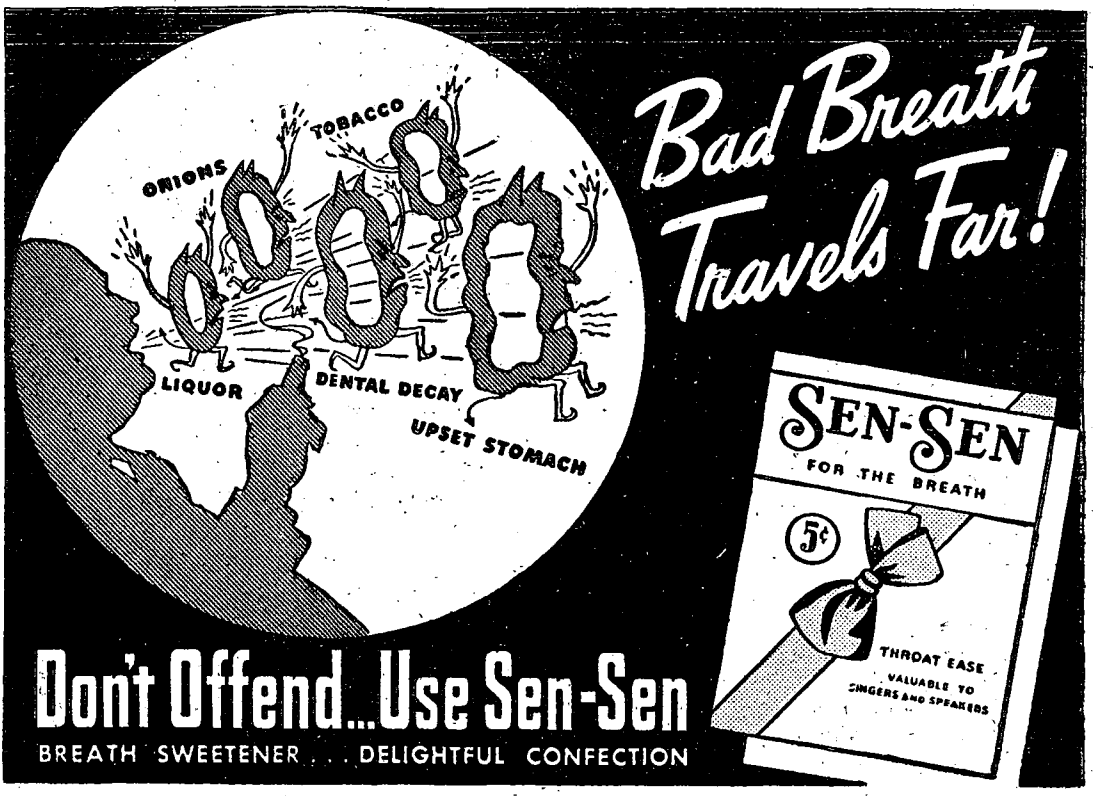
MACILHAINY TOBIN DINED in his usual lonely splendor. He was a little more himself, now. He felt a little rueful, but once he knew what he had to face, he could stand it. He'd die tonight, then. The richest, most powerful man in the history of the world, and he was going to die. It was grimly humorous. Why hadn't he taken a chance on boredom? He could have had his power indefinitely. He had stipulated that his power would last until he slept. As soon as he slept he would pay the penalty for paying no penalties—death. There *must* be a way! One more try—

"Landis!"

"Sir?"

"I want the whole household in the library in fifteen minutes—maids, gardeners, chauffeur, everyone. You, too."

"Very good, sir."

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THEY were all there—twenty-six, including Landis. Tobin got them settled and then locked the door and put the key in his pocket.

"I've called you here as witnesses," he began. "I want your complete attention. All of you are to watch everything I do, hear every word I say, and remember your stories when the police come and question you. You are not to be surprised. There is to be no screaming, fainting, or interference. Riggs, Cramp, come here. And Landis."

The gardener and the chauffeur towered over the butler as they stood together. Tobin folded his arms and leaned back against the desk.

"Landis, you are not to resist or be frightened. Riggs, Cramp, hold him firmly." This ought to do the trick, thought Tobin. Pity he hadn't thought of it in the first place.

He went to the wall and lifted down a heavy scimitar. It was Damascus steel, and Tobin knew that it would pass the time-honored test of slicing a feather floating in midair.

"Hold your head to one side, Landis. That's it. Can everyone see? Very good."

He swung the blade high over his head and brought it down with all his strength. It seemed to melt into Landis' neck; Tobin thought it would never stop. He saw terror on the faces about him, but no one made a move. He had no idea there was so much blood in that scrawny body.

"Let him go." The dead man fell with a squashy *thump*.

"Now," said Tobin, "you are all to wait here quietly for one hour. Then call the police and tell them what has happened."

"Yes, Mr. Tobin," they chorused.

"Good night, everyone."

A few minutes later he lay comfortably in bed and went over it all in his mind. The subtlety of it pleased him. Those murders this afternoon—they had failed because he had relied on coincidence to damn him. Coincidence had worked the other way. But, by merely setting his stage, he had nullified coincidence. He could not be blamed for the other murders, therefore he had done nothing to deserve a death penalty. He *must* be blamed for this one.

It had happened in his day of power, so he would not be penalized. A signed statement lay on the bureau, a carbon copy with an original signature was now in the mail. The fact that the penalty would, in the natural course of events, be brought to bear weeks or months from the time of the murder, did not matter. The fact remained that he had *done something to deserve a death penalty*. That was enough, and he was content with himself and the world.

He lay for a long while watching the butt of his cigarette burn to a white ash in the bedside tray. When it had gone out he yawned, stretched lazily and turned out the light. The last thing that he remembered was the faint tinkle of the doorbell. That would be the police. He smiled and went to sleep.

*"He did it, then. Got away with it. I must say I'm sorry," I said to the man.*

*"Wait. I haven't finished."*

*"But—"*

*"He hadn't finished with his day of power—quite. Listen."*

MACILHAINY TOBIN awoke gently. He smiled. That would be the police. He heard the faint tinkling of the doorbell. He reached up and turned on the light, stretched lazily and yawned. His eyes fell on the bedside tray. A wisp of smoke began curling from the dead ash there; a tiny sliver of paper appeared and grew

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into a cigarette butt. He was quite content with himself and the world— The smoke was curling *downward* toward the butt, not from it, something deep inside his mind told him. Thoughts of the penalty, of the statements, of the afternoon's murders slipped through his mind. After a while he gripped the edge of the sheet, pressed it from him. He arose, pushed his pajamas off. His trunks sailed from a nearby chair into his hand; he bent and laid them on the floor, stepped into them. They flowed up his legs after he was standing straight up; he caught the waist, pulled it together. A button flung itself from the floor, placed itself over the buttonhole, the threads that held it intact again. He finished dressing like a man in a movie film run backward—it *was* running backward.

Backward, he went to the door, down the stairs, into the library. Backward he did the murder, saw Landis' corpse lift limply into the grip of the two servants, pulled the scimitar out of the wound while blood flowed into it, lifted it high over his head, hung it on the wall—and all the while he was talking gibgerish, a horrible language, spoken with inhalations. He went back to the table and ate, and eating was revolting. He went backward out of the house, the cab driver handed him money, backed swiftly up to the park. He saw the boy again, the murders—everything. Until finally he got back home, disgorged his breakfast neatly, went upstairs, pressed his clothes off, wet himself with a towel, got into the tub and climbed out dry; went to bed. Landis moved about softly, backward, closing the curtains— Tobin drifted off to sleep, and as soon as it enveloped him—

"Six o'clock, sir."

"Ah—Landis. Good. Has Synthetic Rubber moved?"

And so he began again his day of power. Again he ordered a shabby youth to kill himself, and swept into his office to start the day, and arranged for the transfers, and ordered Krill to die, and went through all those senseless murders, and went home, and killed Landis, and went to bed. And again, just after he closed his eyes, he heard the doorbell. That would be the police. Again he smiled, and watched the cigarette grow in the ash tray, and again he killed Landis, and again, and again, and again, he lived through his day, backward and forward, backward and forward. His body did as it had done the first time, and so did his mind, but there was something deep inside him, something that neither he nor I could touch nor destroy, that wept and wailed and had no will, that suffered and cried, and knew utmost horror, and had not strength enough even to go mad—It was the only way. He could not die, for he deserved death and denied himself death.

Tobin has another wish coming when he wakes in the morning.

*"That story is true," said the man.*

*"I—believe it. Er—when did it happen?" I said.*

*"When? When? You speak of time, and MacIlhainy Tobin?"*

*"Oh—why did you tell me this story?"*

*"Because after MacIlhainy Tobin had two wishes, he—stopped. If I grant a man wishes, I must grant him three. So you see, my work here is finished. I want you to tell people. I can do no more here." And he left me.*

*Perhaps he was never here at all. But this is the story I wrote last night.*

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# The Reign of Wizardry

by JACK WILLIAMSON

PART II

**In the days of Crete, the Mighty! Theseus—hero of Greek legend—finds the secret of the Dark One, the Minotaur—**

Illustrated by Edd Cartier

Before Greece was more than a wilderness, where semisavage tribes were struggling upward toward real civilization, the Island of Crete was the center of a mighty empire. Babylon was slipping downward, Egypt in one of her low periods—and

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Minos, Emperor of Crete, ruled the world.

A thousand years, legends said, he had ruled—and certainly he had ruled longer than the memory of any man. Three "walls" defended his empire, made Minos impregnable; the wooden walls of his navy, the brass wall of Talos, the Man of Brass, which, somehow, the wizardry of Minos had animated, and, finally, the wall of pure wizardry that had made Knossos, his capital, inviolable.

Theseus, a Greek forced to wander as an outlaw by the power of the Cretan armies and navies, was a pirate preying on Crete's trade—and slipping through their navy's defenses to attack again and again. Known as Captain Firebrand for his flaming hair, his whole aim in life is the destruction of Knossos, and its two cruel masters: Minos and the Minotaur, the half-bull, half-man creature, the Dark One of whom all—Cretan and Greek alike—live in unholy fear. Deep beneath the palace of Knossos, in the Labyrinth which is death and sacrifice to the Dark One to enter, lies the greatest power of Minos—fear! Fear of being sent to the Dark One!

Captain Firebrand captures a ship on which he finds a wizened, fearful little wizard, one Snish, who can, by magic, make himself appear in any form he desires. But Snish's spells, as Snish himself humbly admits, are weak ones. And, since the Cretans have a monopoly of magic, furiously persecuting anyone who attempts to break in on their monopoly, Snish is fleeing constantly, but fruitlessly. He is pursued by ill luck and storms brought on by Cretan magicians. Snish's spell of disguise can be broken, unfortunately, by close contact or a kiss.

However, with the help of one of Snish's disguising spells, Theseus, by a ruse and the help of one of Snish's ill luck storms, gets past Crete's navy, passes even Talos, the Man of Brass, and reaches the city of Knossos in time for the games.

The games, in honor of the Dark One, are open to any contestant. If he wins three bouts—against man, bull, and "gods"—he displaces Minos, becomes the ruler of Crete, and takes Ariadne, Minos' daughter, as his queen. The games have, however, been going on for a thousand years—and Minos still rules. They are quite adequately "fixed."

However, with some aid from Snish at critical instants—his spells aren't strong enough to last long against the Cretan "gods"—their prime magicians, Minos, Ariadne, and Daedalus, Minos' adviser and chief magician—Theseus, still in his magic-disguised form, sufficiently unfixes the games to win them!

Determined to destroy the ruining, deadening reign of wizardry and fear Minos has imposed over all the then-known world, Theseus, still in his disguised form, goes to take formally, the crown of Crete from Minos at the ceremonial banquet.

And at the ceremony, Ariadne kisses him—and Snish's disguising spell is broken. Having won the games in the disguised form, the revealed Theseus was not the winner—and is taken to the dungeons as the pirate Captain Firebrand, with a death penalty on his flaming head!

## XIII.

THE DUNGEON, lost somewhere beneath the rambling maze of Knossos, was not unlike that in which Theseus had awaited the games. A square, granite-lined pit, sunk deep in living rock, it was damp with dripping water, cold with a bone-piercing chill, foul with old decay. Theseus was alone in it.

No faintest ray of light, however, reached the pit to mark the passing days. No sound filtered to it from the life above. Theseus knew there must be guards somewhere in the stone-hewn passages above, but he heard no voice or step. The dungeon was a tomb of living death.

Lying in that other pit, before the games, Theseus had boasted that a man might escape from such a place—if he had to. Now, Theseus saw, he had to. And he tried the plan that he had made.

He had waited endlessly for the guards to come with food. But no food was brought. He seemed as completely isolated as if he had been the only man alive. The justice of the Dark One, apparently, began with solitary starvation.

Theseus felt sure that it must be someone's duty, however, to ascertain from time to time if he still survived. And, when every hope of

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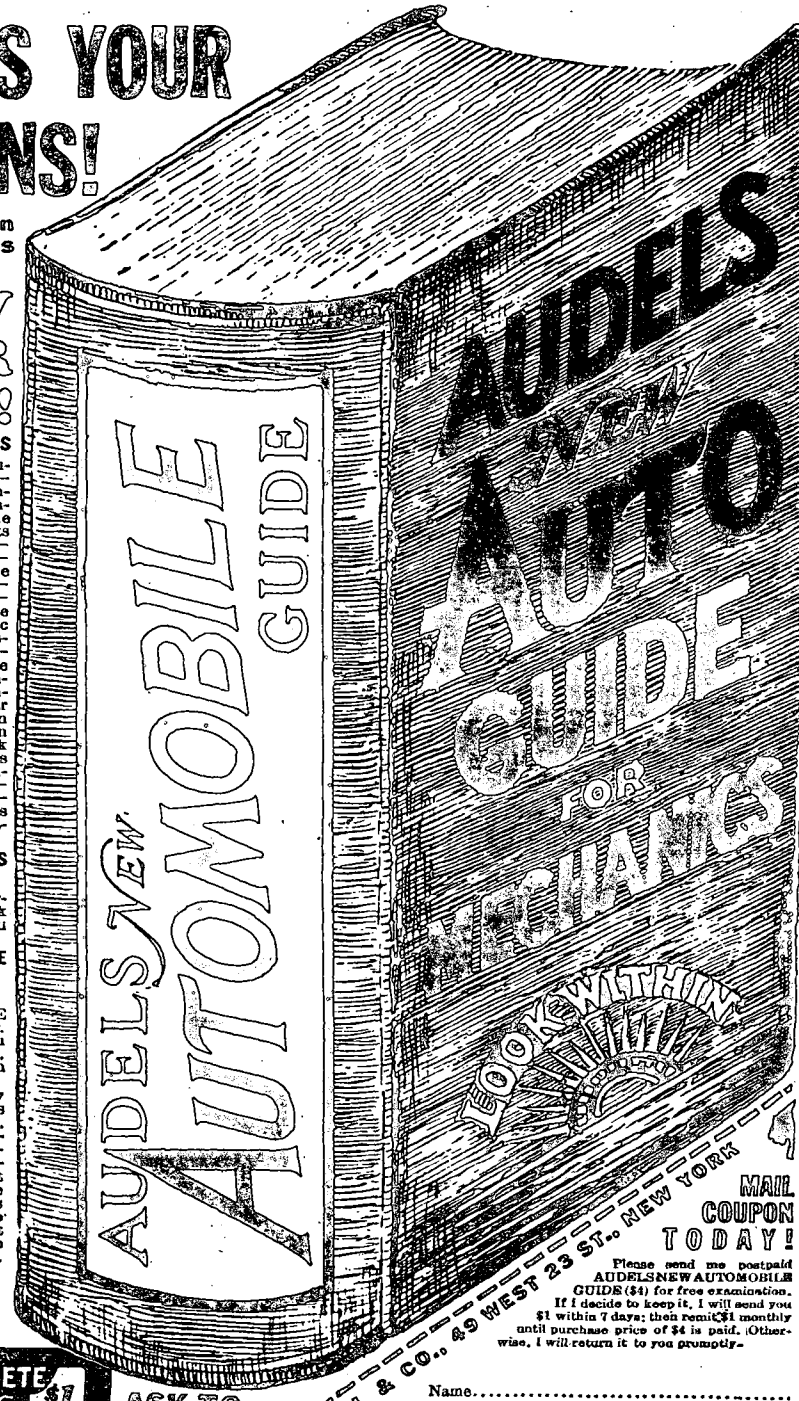


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finding escape by the strength of his own hands was gone, he began calling at intervals into the blackness above:

"Ten talents of silver for a message to Admiral Phaistro!"

Ten talents of silver was four times a man's weight of the most precious metal. One talent was vast wealth. Ten was enough to excite the cupidity of any man. But the voice of Theseus rang hollowly against the bare, hard stone, and died into silence, and there was no response.

He called the words again and again, until his voice was gone. He slept, woke, croaked his hoarse appeal, slept and woke again, and whispered it. Time was short, he knew, when his strength and sanity would last to carry out the plan.

"Naked one, what silver have you?"

At first he could not believe that he had heard that cautious, fearful whisper. He lay still, trembling and breathless on the harsh cold stone. It came again, faintly:

"Doomed one, where is your silver?"

It was real! Theseus tried to quiet his sick shuddering, sought voice and strength and cunning. Chilled with dread of some blunder that might destroy this last tiny hope, he gasped into the dark:

"I have two hundred talents of silver—besides three hundred of gold, and twice that weight of bronze and tin, and forty jars filled with cut stones and jewelry—that Captain Firebrand took from a hundred rich ships of Crete and Egypt and the northern cities. It is buried on an island, and guarded with a wizard's spell, and only the wizard and I can find it."

There was silence in the darkness. Theseus shivered to a fear that he had failed, that the guard had gone away. But at last the whisper came:

"All the silver in the world, pirate—and all the gold and bronze and tin—would not buy one day of freedom for you. For the guard who set you free would doom himself to the justice of the Dark One. And all the treasure in the world could not save a man from the warlocks and the gods."

"But I don't seek escape," whispered Theseus. "I wish merely to bargain for a service. If I am going to the Labyrinth, I have no need of that treasure on the island. I am willing to betray its hiding place, for a service."

"What," came the fearful whisper from above, "is that service?"

"It is one that Admiral Phaistro alone can render." Theseus brought bitterness into his voice. "I was betrayed by one of my officers—a man who had been my best friend. He seized command of my ship, and set me adrift on a helpless hulk to be wrecked on the rocks of Crete. I wish to bargain for revenge against the Dorian pirate, called Cyron the Gamecock. Only the admiral can give me that."

Black silence. A drop of water fell with a tinkling crash into a cold foul pool. Again silence. A sob of breath from above, and a muttered curse, as if avarice and fear battled in the guard. Doubtfully, at last:

"How do I get mine?"

"You can trust Phaistro," urged Theseus. "If he comes here, the secret will be worth ten talents."

"Or my life!" came the mutter. Silence again, and the shattering ring of another water drop. "The admiral has need of your hoard," came the yielding whisper. "I'll tell him to come—if he dares!"

Theseus shuddered with hope, turned weak again.

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*He waited for the far-off echo from unseen depths, then prepared to drop the woman's skull—*

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"Wait!" he called. "Tell Phaistro also that it is useless for him to come, unless he can find and bring with him a certain Babylonian cobbler, who has lately arrived in Ekoros. The cobbler is a squat little yellow-brown man, with the features of a frog. His name is Snish."

"But what," hoarsely whispered the unseen guard, "is the need of a cobbler?"

"The cobbler is also a wizard," breathed Theseus, "and my friend. He aided me to bury the hoard, and guarded it with his arts. Neither of us can find it, or give directions for the finding of it, alone. For each possesses only half the secret. That is the spell."

"I shall tell the admiral," promised the guard. "But, pirate, if this is all a lie—" The threat died in his throat, and he muttered: "What further injury can be done a man already awaiting the justice of the Dark One?"

THERE was silence. The drops of water crashed, loud as the fall of crystal towers. The shattering falls were far apart. The nerves of Theseus grew taut as he waited for each, and his body jerked to the shock, and again he waited through another tense eternity.

A cold shadow of apprehension lay across his spinning, weary brain. For there was, in fact, no such buried hoard. All the loot of the pirate crew, in the time he had been with them, had not amounted to half of what he had enumerated. But a tithe of that had fallen to the share of Captain Firebrand. And he had spent it with a free hand in the markets and the wine shops of a dozen cities, had flung it, more freely yet, to people in want from the wars and the taxations of Minos.

"All Cretans are liars." That was a proverb spoken from Thebes to Troy. A race of liars might well become adept at detecting falsehood. But this invention was now his sole hope of life, and the reeling brain of Theseus clung to it grimly.

Once he dropped into sleep. He dreamed that he had safely mounted the throne of Minos, that lovely Ariadne was his own. But she fled from him, into the Labyrinth of the Dark One. He followed, and found her amid the horrors of that dark, cavernous space, and kissed her. And she changed in his arms to Snish.

The crash of a water drop awoke him, a nerve-shattering avalanche of toppling crystal peaks. He lay on the wet, foul stone, and waited in an agony of tension. The drops crashed and crashed again, measuring intolerable ages.

Theseus thought that he was dreaming again, when he heard the scrape of a foot above. But there were cautious whispers and the muffled clatter of a sword striking stone. Lowered fearfully, he heard the precise, familiar voice of Admiral Phaistro:

"Captain Firebrand?"

"Yes!" Theseus gasped for breath. "Admiral—"

"Silence!" The voice was stifled, frightened. "We'll come down to you."

Still there was no gleam of light. A lock clicked faintly. Men whispered, breathed heavily with effort. There was a heavy creaking, a muffled brazen clang, a choked curse. He knew that the barred trapdoor had been lifted.

Something splashed in a foul puddle beside him. He found the end of a rope ladder, steadied it, as someone descended. He gripped an arm in the darkness, whispered:

"Who is it?"

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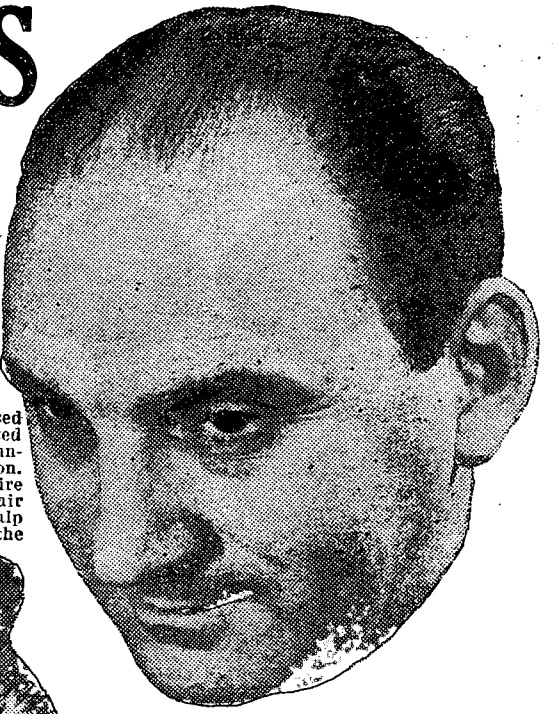

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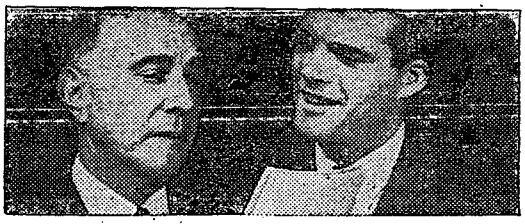

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The reply was no more than a muffled buzz, but he recognized the nasal tones of Snish. The little wizard's body was shuddering and clammy. His breath wheezed through tight wrappings about his head.

"Silence!" The voice of the admiral was thin and dry with fear. "And we dare make no light, for the ears and the eyes of the warlocks are keen!"

He dropped from the ladder beside them, found Theseus with quivering hands.

"There's no time to waste," he gasped. "My marines found this cobbler in a shop. He says he is no wizard, and he was using another name than Snish. But he is a Babylonian. I shall remove his gag."

"He is the wizard," said Theseus. "But let the gag stay. He can use his spell without words—if he wants to avoid being tortured for knowledge of the treasure on the island, and then, perhaps, flung to the Dark One."

Snish trembled more violently and emitted protesting nasal sounds.

"Hush!" The admiral's voice was a startled croak. "Don't speak of—that one. Not here! For we are close above the Labyrinth."

His thin fingers sank frantically into the arm of Theseus.

"And hasten!" he begged hoarsely. "Coming here, I risk my name, my position, my life. I myself am in danger of—that one. So speak quickly. Tell me where I can find your buried hoard. And where the fleet can trap this bearded Dorian—for the Gamecock has slipped through my hands again and captured another trader."

"Then come." Theseus led the admiral away from Snish, toward the corner of the foul cell. "The wizard need not know my part of the secret. And his spell requires no words."

"Hurry!" Phaistro was trembling.

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"The odor of this place would sicken a rat! And the danger—"

THESEUS heard the sudden change in the admiral's voice to tones eerily familiar. The admiral was abruptly taller than himself. The words became a startled gasp, and there was a sound of tearing cloth. Theseus thrust himself free of the frantic clutching hands, slipped back toward the ladder.

"Help!" he shouted. "A trick—a trap! The prisoner has attacked me, stripped me!"

His sobbing voice was the voice of Admiral Phaistro. He caught the ladder, that was already swaying to the mad climbing of Snish, swarmed up it at the little wizard's heels.

"Fools!" bellowed the admiral. "Stop him! He's trying to escape!"

But the admiral spoke in the voice of Captain Firebrand. He splashed frantically about the pools in the yet-unfamiliar cell, groping frantically for the ladder. Theseus reached the door, and quick, tense hands pulled him through.

"Master, are you hurt?"

"No, praise to Minos," gasped the precise new voice of Theseus. "But the pirate's treasure is all a lie—one worthy of a good Cretan. He assaulted me—planning, no doubt, to murder me under the darkness and escape in my clothing."

Unseen men were straining frantically. The massive bronze grate fell again, with a dull, heavy sound, muffling the screams and curses from below. Locks snapped. A slave wrapped Theseus in the loose robe that the admiral had laid aside before he descended the ladder.

"Quick!" whispered Theseus. "We must escape before his uproar calls other guards! Or we'll all face—that one! Firebrand's hoard was a lie—but still I'll see that you are all rewarded. Let's get out of here!"

Frightened guards led the hurried, furtive way through confused black passages, up long ramps, through a series of locked doors, and at last into one of the deeper palace magazines, where rows of huge jars held oil and wine. Finally a side door let them into an alley beneath the starlit bulk of Knossos, where a palanquin was waiting.

Theseus relaxed, trembling, on its scented cushions.

"Back home," he said anxiously, "before we are discovered!"

"But there's no danger now," said the servant, who had helped him into the litter, in the tone of one who enjoys his master's confidence. "We have been aboard often enough by night. Men will merely laugh and whisper that the admiral is wooing his goddess again."

The servant made a hollow chuckle.

"It's unfortunate that the pirate lied, but at least the trickery was not all his own. If he knew that you had captured his old comrades two moons ago, sold his men to Amur the Hittite, and already sent the Gamecock ahead of him into the Dark One's Labyrinth!"

The servant laughed thickly in the darkness.

## XIV.

THESEUS LAY between scented sheets of fine Egyptian linen. He opened his eyes on a long room. The frescoed walls showed graceful girls in a harvest dance. Hinged window screens of tinted oiled parchment were open, to reveal a quiet garden where birds sang in pomegranate trees.

The surroundings were all of rich luxury and high-walled security, but Theseus could not help a cold shudder of fear. He rubbed the smooth-

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ness of the sheets, and buried his face again in the fragrant pillow, afraid that he would yet wake up in the foul darkness of the pit.

For the success of his desperate plan seemed still a dream. He could hardly credit, even now, the splendor of this hilltop villa, to which the frightened slaves had brought him. The midnight feast that the chamberlain had set still seemed a vision of his starvation-goaded brain—and he was ravenous again.

But he remembered the chamberlain's laugh about his old companions' capture, the Gamecock already sent to the justice of the Dark One. That stiffened his dream into hard reality, sobered his incredulous joy. He was awake, all right, and he had things to do—Cyron had to be avenged!

He sat up on the bed. A tin mirror propped on a marble table showed him the sharp, narrow face of Admiral Phaistro. He made a grimace at the bulging forehead, womanish red lips, and retreating chin. It was not a face he liked—but still he was mutely thankful for the gift of Snish.

"Did you call, master?"

The chamberlain, who hid the confidences of Phaistro under a countenance of rigid disapproval, was bowing in the doorway.

"Bring my breakfast," Theseus ordered.

"A quail's egg?" asked the servant. "And barley water?"

"Porridge with milk," amended Theseus. "A broiled fowl, honey cakes, and fruit—" Astonishment broke through the chamberlain's rigid face, and he cut short the order. "And send me the cobbler," he said. "The man is versed in certain small Babylonian spells, and he has promised to brew a wonderful philter for me."

"The master requires a wonderful philter indeed," returned the stiff-faced servant, "if he still aspires to the goddess. Your pardon, your breakfast! I rejoice that the master feels so hearty."

The bowl of porridge arrived—incongruously upon a long silver tray carried by two slaves. Snish came waddling behind them. Apprehension sat upon his seamed, wide-mouthed face, and his yellow pop-eyes darted about uneasily. Theseus sent away the slaves, and invited the little wizard to share his breakfast.

Snish, however, was in no mood to eat.

"Master!" he croaked, when his blinking yellow eyes had followed the slaves out of sight. "Do you know the peril that your mad plot has brought upon us?"

"I can see a danger," admitted Theseus. "If one man can get out of that pit, another can. And the presence of two admirals would make for confusion. Therefore, we must work swiftly. Try these Egyptian dates."

Bending fearfully, Snish shook his brown, bald head.

"It's worse than that, master!" he whispered. "Once your guise was broken—you must know that any close touch will turn you back to Captain Firebrand. And send us both to the Labyrinth! If these Cretan warlocks take us, my poor power will not serve again."

The whisper sank to a sobbing whine.

"Why, master, did you have to set Phaistro's marines after me?" He quivered, and tears sprang into the bulging eyes. "I had sold Tai Leng's jewels, and bought a tiny shop on a good street, with last and hammer and needle. Business is better here

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than in Babylon, and I had learned to be contented."

Snish blew his nose on a loose corner of his loincloth. "I was happy, master," he sighed. "I was busy all day—until the admiral's men came in the darkness, and broke down the shutters of my shop, and choked me with gags, and dragged me away without one word of explanation to the dungeons under Knossos."

The yellow eyes blinked. "Remember, master, I am no bold soldier of fortune. I am merely a luckless cobbler, with no stomach for such adventures as this. And had I not repaid my debt to you, master, on the day the games were played?"

"Try one of these honey cakes," said Theseus. "So you did aid me? I had wondered. You profess to be only a minor wizard, and yet you tell me that you defeated the warlocks of Crete?"

Snish shook his head, fearfully.

"I am the very smallest wizard, master," he protested anxiously "My small powers are almost beneath the notice of the jealous warlocks of Knossos. Else they would have discovered and destroyed me long ago—as they will surely do yet, if you force me to defy them any further!" Paling, he shivered.

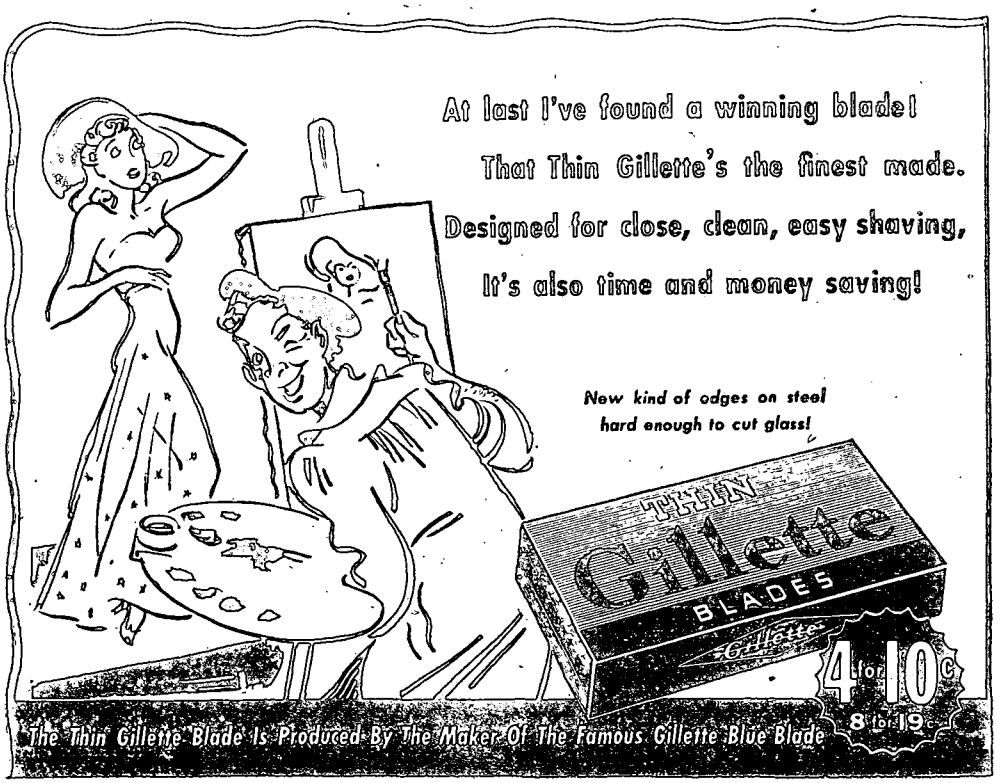
"The arrow and the boomerang and the wizard's shot went by me," said Theseus. "How?"

THE YELLOW frog face faintly grinned.

"It was through the same small art that you already know, master," wheezed Snish. "After each god had launched his weapon, I changed you —too briefly for the eye to see the change—into the likeness of myself."

"Yourself?" muttered Theseus.

"The missiles were all," Snish told him, "aimed at your head. But Gothung was a tall man, and I am short. Therefore, the gods shot high.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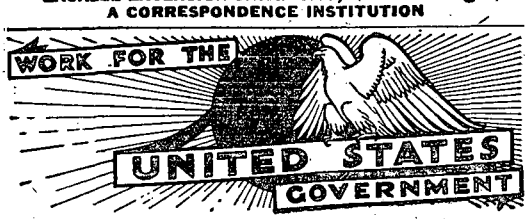


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But I trembled lest they discover the trick!"

Theseus stared for a moment at the seamed yellow face, and tried to curtain the doubt in his eyes. He had felt that an effort of his own, a reckless defiance of wizardry, had helped deflect those shots. But the tearful face of Snish was earnest.

"These pickled olives are superb," he said. "Try them. The trick was very clever, Snish, and I thank you for my life. If Ariadne hadn't kissed me—"

"But she did!" whispered Snish. "And here you have flung yourself back into the same danger—dragging me after you!" The whisper sank. "Tell me, master—what are your plans? Since you are now the admiral, shall we not take the swiftest ship in the harbor and sail while we can?"

"No," said Theseus, and the thin features of the admiral turned hard with resolve. "I came here to crush the wizardry of Knossos—to end the reign of Minos and the dominion of the Dark One. And I shall!"

"Caution, master!" urged the fearful voice of Snish. "And don't shout! The warlocks have very keen ears for any such talk as that. Haven't you suffered enough from the folly of your purpose?"

"But don't you see?" protested Theseus. "The goal is already half won. As admiral, I am master of the wooden wall of Knossos. I can walk safely by Talos, the brass wall. There remains only the third—the wall of wizardry. That is all that stands before us, now."

"You are still Captain Firebrand!" Teeth chattering, Snish clung to the tall carved bedpost. "The warlocks had better look to their weapons—as doubtless they will!" He tried faintly to grin. "But perhaps Ariadne could tell you something about this wall of wizardry."

"Doubtless," said Theseus, wist-

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fully. "If a man might speak alone with Cybele."

Snish grinned more broadly.

"Evidently, you are not familiar with the gossip in the servants' quarters." Anxiously, the little wizard caught the arm of Theseus. "Master," he begged, "beware of her kiss! Or we'll both end in the Labyrinth."

Theseus picked up the jeweled tin mirror and surveyed the thin, aristocratic face of Admiral Phaistro without enthusiasm.

"Women," he commented, "are very strange creatures. And goddesses, apparently, as well. When am I going to see her?"

"You are expecting a message today," Snish told him.

"What else have you learned in the servants' quarters?"

"Your financial affairs," Snish informed him, "are in a very bad way. You gamble recklessly, and spend tremendous sums for feasts and bribes, to maintain your position. You are deeply in debt to Amur the Hittite. That is why you were so anxious to secure the hidden hoard of Captain Firebrand. Amur, by the way, is coming to call on you this morning."

"The scorpion," muttered Theseus. "Thank you, Snish." He smiled. "Keep your ears open and your small arts ready to serve me—and perhaps you will live to be an honest cobbler yet."

WAITING to receive Amur in the great dusky hall, Theseus could not check a little shiver of apprehension. The Hittite, with his golden power, was almost as obnoxious as the warlocks. Hawk-nosed and sallow, lean-limbed and big-bellied, Amur left his palanquin in the court and bowed as he entered the hall.

"Your most humble slave, lord admiral."

For all his fawning smirk, however, his voice held a veiled arrogance. Too small, too close together, his black eyes glittered, watchful and ruthless.

"Your slave beseeches upon you the favor of the gods." The husky voice had an almost oily softness. "And he regrets that his own dire poverty forces him to mention a certain small matter—that your notes are due again today, for five hundred talents of silver. Will it please the lord admiral to repay his slave that insignificant debt?"

Theseus met those snakelike eyes.

"The money isn't ready today," he said. "You will have to wait. As you know, the expenses of my position are heavy."

"Well I know it!" Amur abandoned the mask of servility, and his voice became a venomous hiss. "I've paid them for the last ten years." He shook a lean, yellow fist. "But I'm through paying them, Phaistro. Unless those notes are paid, Minos will have a new admiral—and the Dark One a new guest!"

"Wait." Theseus gestured protestingly. "You'll get the money." He tried to think. "I have learned where the pirate Firebrand hid his loot. A squadron of the fleet sails tomorrow to recover it. There will be enough—"

Amur's yellow claw made a fist again.

"You won't put me off with that." His glittering eyes, Theseus thought, were like a hungry rat's. "I have already learned how you spent the five talents you borrowed—to bribe the dungeon guards—and how the pirate duped you with his lies. If one word of your folly reaches Minos, it will take no more to break you, Phaistro!"

"I was a fool, last night," yielded

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Theseus. "But there are other ways of getting money."

"You always were a fool, Phaistro," snarled the Hittite. "But you have one way to obtain the money—and, unless you do, Minos will learn all he needs to know."

"One way?" repeated Theseus.

"So the goddess still frowns?" The Hittite laughed. "I warned you that it wouldn't be easy, Phaistro—not even for a lover of your famed skill—to unlock the treasury of Cybele."

"Well—" said Theseus, uncertainly.

"I'll give you one more night to try." Amur turned to go. "If she laughs at you again—well, the Dark One is always hungry." He put on the servile mask and bowed. "Farewell, master. May the goddess favor you tonight with many kisses—and the keys to her treasury!"

Alone, Theseus sat down on a couch and rubbed reflectively at the weak chin of Admiral Phaistro. He lost any regret for the ruse that had left the Cretan in the pit. A man who made love for money— The chamberlain entered, carrying a tiny sealed scroll.

"Master, a message for you." His face was rigid. "It bears the seal of Cybele."

Theseus broke the seal, unrolled the small square sheet of papyrus. An eagerness checked his breath, as he read the delicate Minoan script:

Mortal—if indeed you feel yourself worth the favors of a goddess—come to the old shrine in my olive grove, after the evening star has set tonight.

With mingled impatience and trepidation, Theseus waited for the fall of night. In the afternoon, officers came to see him about certain naval matters. At first he attempted to put them off, fearing to expose ignorance. But it soon appeared that Phaistro concerned himself little with affairs of the fleet. The officers wanted nothing more than the impression of his official seal upon certain clay-tablet requisitions and reports. The chamberlain brought the little graven cylinder, he rolled it across the documents, the officers thanked him and departed.

When they were gone, the chamberlain reminded him that he was due at the palace at sunset, to attend the reception of a visiting Egyptian embassy. Theseus said that he was ill. The chamberlain grimly promised him medicine, and objected that his absence would please neither Minos nor the Pharaoh.

Theseus submitted to being bathed, oiled, and perfumed. Slaves dressed his long black hair with scented pomades, arranged it in buns and pigtails, attired him in an embroidered robe of purple silk.

And the chamberlain brought his medicine—a flagon of strong brandy. Theseus drank enough to scent his breath, and found an opportunity to pour a generous amount of the remainder down a drain—wonderful, this modern plumbing! It might be useful to seem drunk, but this was no night—of all nights!—to be actually tipsy.

The palanquin carried him to the forbidding bulk of Knossos. He shuddered, as if the very shadow of the ancient walls might break the spell of his guise. When he came into the frescoed splendor of the throne room—walking unsteadily, with the chamberlain holding his arm—he was appalled again to see the gnarled, hollow visage of Daedalus, the yellow, black-beaked mask of Amur, the rosy, dimpled smile of Minos.

The reception went on, however, and none of them seemed to consider it unusual that the chamberlain must

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hold the admiral's arm, whisper every necessary word into his ear.

The brown Egyptians entered, small, proud men. They spoke politely of the greatness of Minos, pompously of the grandeur of Pharaoh, fervidly of the friendship of the monarchs.

Theseus said only what the chamberlain whispered into his ear. As the affair continued, however, he permitted himself a few undiplomatic alcoholic slips of the tongue. He was beginning to enjoy the masquerade.

The evening star was low when he got back to the villa of the admiral. He left the chamberlain, waked the apprehensive Snish to come with him, and ordered the slaves to carry him to the old temple in the sacred grove of Cybele.

In the shadow of an olive, at the edge of the grove, he left the palanquin, telling the bearers to wait. Snish followed him toward the dim beehive shape of the ancient temple, protesting:

"Caution, master! Remember that one kiss will change you!"

Theseus chuckled.

"But we shall be in the dark," he said. "And you will be waiting here, when I return, to restore the likeness of the admiral!"

He walked boldly into the shadows, seeking Ariadne.

## XV.

THE TEMPLE, erected over the fissure through which Cybele had been born from the mother earth, was a small, ancient beehive of unhewn stone. Rushes scattered the floor. Offerings of fruits and flowers lay withering upon a small altar, at the lip of the dank-smelling hole.

With a sharp hurt of disappointment, Theseus realized that the dark little chamber was empty. He waited, kneeling on the rushes as if praying before the earth womb. At

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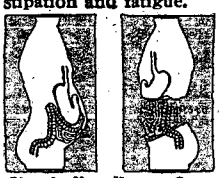

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last a rustle made him turn. His heart leaped with gladness when he knew that Ariadne had come.

For a moment, in the pointed arch of the entrance, she stood outlined against the night sky. She was tall and proud, and the light of the stars shone faintly on her hair.

"Mortal?" Her golden voice was muted. "You are here?"

"Goddess," whispered Theseus, "here I am!"

He rose from the altar and took her in his arms. She seemed at first cold and unresponsive, and even somewhat startled at his ardor, so that he began to wonder why she had made the assignation.

Presently, however, something in her seemed to take fire from his avid lips, and her mouth and her long, eager body returned his caresses. For a time neither of them felt any need of speech, and then:

"Well, goddess," whispered Theseus, "is any mortal worth your kisses?"

In a faint and shaken voice, she answered from his arms:

"There is one!" There was another time of silence, and then she added: "This is not what I came to find. For it was pity, not passion, that brought me here tonight. I came to bring warning that your enemies plan to destroy you, through your debts and your drunkenness and your indiscretions. I did not think to find—you!"

For a time again they required no words. Even Theseus, for a little space, forgot the purpose that had brought him to Crete. But presently a cold, slow movement of Ariadne's serpent girdle brought it back to him, and his arms tightened about her. "Would a goddess make jest of a mortal's love?"

The warm body seemed to quiver in his arms, and the golden voice was husky: "Never of yours."

"Then," pursued Theseus, "how

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would she prove her love?"

Ariadne kissed him, before she said: "I have been waiting for you to speak of that. For I know of your debt to Amur, and his threats. I came tonight to warn you to leave Crete while you could. But that was before—"

Her voice broke, and she clung to him. "In the treasury of Cybele," she whispered, "there are two thousand talents of silver. Tomorrow I shall send Amur a draft on the temple, for the amount of your debt."

"Thanks, goddess," whispered Theseus. "But I can't accept that."

Surprise stiffened her in his arms. They sat up on the rushes, and Theseus moved a little from her. Her warm hands clung to him. "Then, mortal," she breathed, "what do you desire?"

"If a goddess would prove her love of a mortal," he said softly, "she must offer more than silver. And there is another thing." His voice fell to a murmur. "A secret thing, called the wall of wizardry."

Ariadne made a little gasp, as of pain. Her fingers sank into the arm of Theseus with an abrupt, spasmodic force. For a long time she was tensely silent, trembling. Then she whispered faintly:

"Must you require the wall, mortal? For that is tenfold more precious than all the treasure in the temple. It is more precious than my life or my divinity. Must you take it?"

Elation leaped in the heart of Theseus. He had not known that Ariadne possessed the mysterious wall; he had hoped for no more than some hint of its nature. Striving to calm his hands and his voice:

"Love," he whispered, "that sets anything above itself is not love."

Her hot, fragrant arms crept around him. The cold, writhing coil of the serpent girdle touched his side. Her hair caressed him, its perfume half intoxicating. Her lips sought his.

"Kiss me," she whispered. "Forget your insane folly!"

But Theseus turned his face away from hers. "Then it isn't love," he whispered bitterly. "It is merely a jest." He pulled out of her arms and rose. "Farewell, goddess."

"Wait!" She rose after him, caught his arm. "You forget your enemies. I came to warn you—leave me, now, and you shall die before the dawn!"

Theseus pushed away her clinging hands.

"You don't understand the love of mortals, goddess, if you think that threats will buy it." He caught her tall, quivering body, drew her to him. "One kiss of farewell, because the love of mortals is real. Then I go—even, if must be, into the Dark One's lair!"

He held her to him, so close that he felt the thud of her heart. He kissed her soft throat, her seeking lips, her hair. Then, firmly, he swung her from him, and strode toward the doorway of the little temple.

"Wait, mortal!" she sobbed after him. "Here—not to prove my love, but to save your life—here is the wall!"

THESEUS CAME slowly back to her. In the faint starlight that filtered through the entrance, he saw that she was reaching into her silken bodice. She drew out some little object and solemnly pressed it into his hands.

Swiftly he fingered it. There was a thin, smooth chain that she had worn about her neck. Strung upon it, like a single long bead, was a tiny cylinder. It was warm from

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her flesh, the surface of it uneven with some graven design.

"This," he whispered, wondering, "is the wall?"

"It is," she told him. "It is a small thing, and simple—yet it holds a concentration of power greater than the Dark One's. Guard it well!"

"What is its power?" Theseus eagerly demanded.

Ariadne hesitated for an instant, and her tall body tensed again. "This is the secret of it," she breathed at last. "The man who holds it safe shall be master of Knossos, and no wizardry can prevail against him."

Theseus caught her shoulders. "Then you have given me Knossos?" She winced from his hard fingers. "Or is this another warlock's trick?"

"I have given you the wall—would you doubt me now?"

Theseus held her shuddering shoulders.

"If this thing *is* the wall," he demanded, "why do you carry it, and not Minos?"

"There was a reason why my father could not keep it with him," she whispered. "He trusted me—in all the years that I have lived, I have met no such mortal as you are." Her whisper sank. "Now, kiss me!"

Theseus clasped the chain about his neck and kissed her. When at last, breathless, they had drawn apart, Ariadne breathed:

"Now that I have proven my love, with the greatest gift that I could give, we must leave Knossos tonight—before my father's arts discover my betrayal. Have your fleetest ship made ready. My slaves will load it with silver. And we shall be sailing toward Egypt before the dawn."

Theseus touched the little hard cylinder on the chain. "But why must we take flight," he whispered, "when now the third wall is mine?

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Didn't you say that it would give me Knossos, and guard me against all wizardry? Then can't we claim the throne?"

Ariadne shook her head, against him.

"There is often an irony in the spells of wizardry," she whispered. "If the wall gave you Knossos, it might be for as brief a space as it was ruled by the Northman who was victor in the games."

She shivered in his arms. "Again, if the wall will guard you against wizardry, it will not defend you from an arrow or a blade or a strangler's cord. The wizards may recover it by cunning and force, and then you will be once more at their mercy."

Theseus lifted his head. "If the wall has any power," he said, "I shall use it."

Ariadne clung to him. "I have tried to warn you," she whispered. "Your enemies learned that you were coming here tonight. They have set a trap. You can't even walk out of this temple alive—without my aid. Yet you talk of unseating Minos!"

Theseus breathed, "And I shall!"

She laughed, half hysterical, and flung her arms tight about him.

"I know why you came to Crete," she cried softly. "But can't you see the mad folly of it? No mortal can hope to overwhelm the empire of my divine father—not even you, Captain Firebrand!"

Theseus stood for a moment, frozen. "So you know?"

"Did you think, captain, that I could forget your first kiss so soon?"

"Still, knowing, you gave me the wall?"

"That is the reason." Her voice reflected scorn. "Would I give it to that drunken weakling, Phaistro?"

Theseus was hoarse with wonderment. "And you would sail to Egypt with a pirate?"

"Yes, anywhere—with Firebrand!" Her quivering hands tugged at him. "Shall we go?"

Theseus stared down into the darkness. His mind saw all the splendor of her proud body, the flame of her ruddy hair, the flashing spirit of her cool green eyes. Her arms made a caressing movement about him. At last, sighing, he said gravely:

"I wish that my business were less urgent in Crete. But I can't abandon it—not even for a goddess. When Minos has been unthroned, and the power of wizardry shattered, and the dominion of the Dark One ended—then, perhaps, I shall seek you."

Her voice was choked, barely audible: "You would destroy my father—all my world?"

"I must. Can you forgive me?"

"I . . . I don't know." She was sobbing; he held her in his arms. "I love you, Firebrand."

Then Theseus glimpsed the sky through the arch, and said: "The morning star is rising. I must go—if I can pass these enemies. And—if the third wall is what you told me—by tonight I shall be upon your father's throne!"

She rose with him from the rushes. "I'll go with you," she said. "Wherever you go. Because I have betrayed my trust, and I can't face my father's anger."

"No." Theseus put her gently from him. "The danger is too great, until I have won." He kissed her. "There is a better way." He grasped the silken bodice, ripped it. "If Minos finds that you have lost the wall, it was taken from you by trickery and force, and through no fault of yours!" He crushed her in a last



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embrace. "Now go—I'll give you time to leave the grove. Farewell!"

WAITING, after she had vanished through the arch, he unclasped the thin chain, tossed the tiny cylinder of the third wall upon his palm. If enemies were indeed waiting outside, it might be more secure, for the time, anywhere than on his person. Another apprehension shadowed him: if Minos found it unwise to carry the wall, it might be equally unwise for him.

After a moment he crossed the little altar, lowered himself into the chill, musty fissure beyond. If Cybele had indeed been born from it, he thought, she must have emerged prematurely. For the crack narrowed swiftly, until it wedged his feet and caught his exploring fingers.

He found a tiny recess, well hidden from the surface, and thrust the cylinder and chain deep into it. The talisman would not be discovered by accident, he knew, unless some worshiper profaned this most sacred spot in Crete.

And knowledge of the hiding place, he felt, might well be a more secure advantage than possession of the wall upon his person. Ariadne had kissed him tonight—but she must have been the daughter of Minos for nearly a thousand years.

He dragged himself out of the dank-smelling fissure, leaving a few bits of skin, and hurried out of the temple, through the starlight and shadow of the ancient silent grove, toward the tree where he had left Snish waiting.

"Here, wizard!" he called softly. "Restore the admiral's guise!"

But silence replied. A louder call brought no answer. Theseus searched beneath the tree, peered up into the branches, ran to the next. But Snish was gone. Panic clutched at the heart of Theseus. Without the little wizard's aid, all he had won was gone. He was trapped again, without disguise.

"Here he is!" A sharp voice ripped through the night. "Take him."

Theseus stood motionless, shuddering. For that was the thin, angry voice of the admiral himself. Phaistro had escaped from the dungeon and the likeness of the doomed pirate—and, of course, had soon discovered where to strike. Ariadne, Theseus guessed with a new sinking of his heart, had known of the escape and the danger; why hadn't her warning been more definite?

Dim shapes flitted through the shadows of the olives.

"The pirate!" cried Phaistro. "Take him alive, for the Dark One!"

## XVI.

THESEUS had come weaponless to the tryst; even the admiral's bronze blade he had left in the palanquin. For an instant he half regretted that he had left the wall of wizardry, wondering if its power might now have served him. But he set himself empty-handed to the matter of escape.

"Greetings, admiral!" he shouted into the shadows. "But you may find you had done better to keep the shape of Captain Firebrand!"

He crouched as he shouted, sprinted down a dim avenue of olives. The shrill voice of Phaistro screamed angry commands behind him, and scores of men burst out of shadow clumps.

Cast nets spun about Theseus. He leaped them, ducked them. But one tripped him, and he went down painfully. A panting marine was instantly upon him. He grasped the haft of a thrusting trident, twisted

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it, heaved, sent the Cretan reeling into the darkness.

Kicking out of the net, he ran again. Three marines stood up before him. He flung the trident like a spear. The middle man went down. Theseus leaped between whirling nets, and ran on down toward the river.

The uproar pursued, and torches flared against the pale glow of dawn. No more men appeared ahead, however, and he began to hope that he had evaded Phaistro's trap. Once across the river, he could doubtless find some temporary hiding place; he might make himself a disguise less fickle than those of Snish; there would be time to plan whatever new attack that possession of the wall of wizardry might make possible.

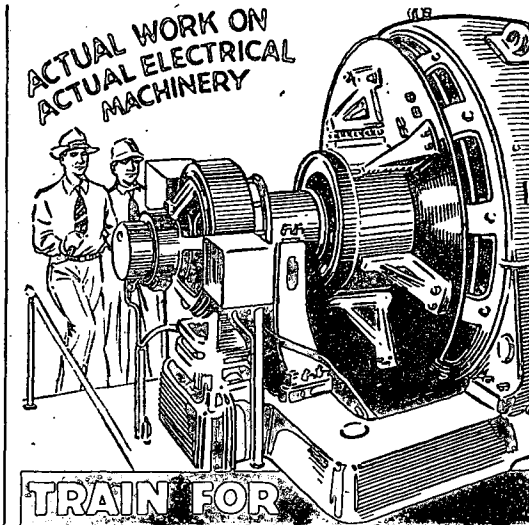
But, even as he went at a stumbling run down a narrow, dry ravine, doubts returned to check his feet. Had Ariadne betrayed her father—or him?

"No!" he sobbed. "That couldn't be!"

He remembered the vital pressure of her clinging body, the hot magic of her kisses. He believed she really loved him. But, if he had a purpose more important than love, so might she. A goddess would hardly betray her own pantheon. After all, she was doubtless about fifty times as old as she looked—and the vessel of Cybele, besides! A kiss couldn't mean so much to her!

He paused for breath in a clump of brush—and abruptly all hope of escape was shattered. For a deep, brazen bellow rolled above the shouts of the men behind. He saw a torch carried high as the trees. Its rays glinted on the gigantic metal body of Talos.

The brass man came lumbering down the ravine. The flame-yellow of his eyes was as bright, almost, as the torch. Rocks crashed, and the ground quivered under his tread.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Theseus crouched lower in the brush. For an instant, breathless, he dared to hope that Talos would go by. But the crashing stopped abruptly, and the giant stood above him like a metal colossus.

"Captain Firebrand," boomed that mighty voice, "you are taken again for the Dark One. Probably you think you are clever. But you shall not escape me—not with all your tricks and masks. For Talos is no fool!"

The ravine's bank, at that instant, gave way beneath the giant's weight. He sat down ignominiously in a cloud of dust. Theseus leaped to his feet, darted on toward the river.

But Talos, moving in spite of his bulk with a terrible swiftness, recovered his footing. With three crashing strides, he overtook Theseus, caught his arm in a great hand whose metal was almost searingly hot.

"No, Captain Firebrand," rumbled the giant. "This time you shall certainly meet the Dark One. Talos can promise you that. And you may find, after all, that you are the fool!"

That blistering, resistless hand held Theseus until the admiral and his men came up in the gray increasing light of dawn. Phaistro trembled with a fresh rage to discover his own embroidered robe upon Theseus—somewhat torn from the race down the ravine. His marines stripped Theseus.

"Never mind your nakedness, pirate dog!" He spat. "Men need no clothing in the Labyrinth."

THESEUS was presently conducted back toward the town. Sharp stones and briers injured his bare feet—for Phaistro had recovered the beaded buskins. Marching in a hollow square about him, the marines kept prodding him with their tridents. Talos stalked watchfully behind.

Hopefully, Theseus wondered

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about the fate of Snish. He saw no evidence that the little wizard had fallen into the trap. Perhaps his ever-belittled arts had still served to save him. But there was scant likelihood, Theseus thought, that Snish would come voluntarily to his aid—or small chance, perhaps, that he could defeat the wizardry of Crete again, even if he tried.

The sun had risen by the time they came through groves and vineyards into view of the great ancient pile of Knossos. The admiral, carried in his palanquin before the marching marines, shouted back at Theseus:

"Look well at that sun, pirate—for you won't see it again. Men don't come back from the justice of the Dark One."

They passed the dark Etruscan guards standing rigid at the entrance, and came into the winding confusion of the corridors of the palace. Night fell upon them again, for the sun was not high enough to cast its rays into the shafts. Lamps still flared in dusky passages.

A group of black-robed Minoan priests met them, armed with long bronze-bladed lances. Their leader reported to Talos:

"Minos is ready to sit in judgment at once. The prisoner will have no chance to escape again. He is to be brought without delay to the hall of the Dark One."

The marines fell back, and the black priests formed another hollow square. Lances drove Theseus forward again, and Talos stalked behind.

They entered none of the courts or halls that Theseus had seen before. The priests took up torches from a niche beside the way, and lit them from a red-flaring lamp. Unfamiliar turnings took them into long descending passages. There were no light wells, and the air had the dank chill of perpetual darkness.

At last they came to a massive double door of bronze. It was ornamented with huge bulls' heads, of the same metal, and green with age-old damp. Talos strode ahead of the priests, and his metal fist thundered against it.

At last the door opened silently, and the lances urged Theseus into a long, narrow hall. Its walls were massive blocks of Egyptian basalt, illuminated only with the dull, varicolored flicker of a tripod brazier.

Upon a low dais, beyond the brazier, were three black stone seats. Black-robed Daedalus, the hand and the voice of the Dark One, sat in the center. White-robed, rosy face dimpled merrily, Minos was on his right. On his left, in green, sat Ariadne—motionless.

In the brazier's uncertain light, Theseus stared at her. She sat proud and straight upon the basalt throne. The white perfection of her face was serenely composed. Her eyes shone cool and green again the flame, and she did not appear to see him.

The white dove sat motionless on her shoulder, and its bright black eye seemed to watch him. The serpent girdle gleamed against her waist, slowly writhing, and the eyes in its flat silver head were points of sinister crimson.

Theseus tensed himself against a shuddery chill along his spine. He tried to draw his eyes from the enigmatic vessel of Cybele. It was hard to believe this the same being whose kisses had been so fervid in the ancient shrine.

While half the black priests stood with ready lances, the rest knelt, chanted. The reverberation of a huge brazen gong—deep as the bellow of some monstrous bull—set all the hall to quivering.

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Theseus stood, stiffened and shivering, until at last the gong throbbed and shuddered into silence. The three stood up, upon the dais. Framed in fine white hair, the rosy face of Minos dimpled to a genial smile.

"We, the lesser gods, have heard the charges against this notorious criminal, the Achean pirate, called Firebrand." The woman-voice was soft; the small blue eyes twinkled merrily. "It is clear to us that the weight of his crimes demands the prompt judgment of the Dark One."

Fat pink hands fingered the silk of his robe, and he smiled jovially at the tall, naked body of Theseus.

"Therefore," he chuckled softly, "we remand the prisoner to the Labyrinth that is the dwelling of the Dark One, to face his eternal justice."

He turned, and his blue eyes twinkled into the dark, skeletal visage of Daedalus. "Do you, the hand and the voice of the Dark One, concur?"

The hollow, musty voice of the gnarled warlock grated: "I concur."

With his rosy baby-smile, Minos turned to Ariadne. "And you, vessel of Cybele, who is daughter of the Dark One?"

BREATHLESS, Theseus watched her. The green eyes came slowly to him. Some tremor of her body made the white dove shift its balance. But her eyes remained remote and cold, and her golden voice said faintly:

"I concur."

The dancing eyes of Minos came back to Theseus and the tall bulk of Talos, waiting rigidly behind him.

"The gods concur." Laughter sparkled in his liquid voice. "Now let the door to the Labyrinth be opened, so that the prisoner may cross the threshold of the Dark One to face his judgment."

Talos moved startlingly, like a statue abruptly animated. But Ariadne, with an imperious little gesture of her bare white arm, froze him into inert bright metal again.

"Wait," she said. "I've a gift for the prisoner."

Minos and Daedalus turned swiftly upon her. The pink, cherubic features of Minos forgot their dimpled smile, and the seamed dark face of the high priest twisted into a mask of frightful wrath. Protesting whispers hissed.

From beside her on the black throne, Ariadne lifted a long roll of papyrus.

"This is a copy of the 'Book of the Dead,'" said her even golden tones, "that was brought by the Pharaoh's ambassadors. It is intended for the guidance of the soul beyond the gates of death." Her laugh was a tinkle of mockery, and the green eyes were cold. "I believe that Captain Firebrand will have use for it."

The merry eyes of Minos and the hollow, flaming ones of Daedalus peered at her doubtfully. Minos made a little, impatient bouncing motion on his black throne. The rusty voice of the warlock croaked:

"The prisoner has no need of it. It is the custom that men should meet the Dark One as they came from his daughter, naked, with empty hands. And even the soul required no guidance beyond the Dark One's dwelling, for it will be consumed."

But the pink, chubby body of Minos was shaken with abrupt merriment. "My daughter jests," he sobbed. "Remember, the prisoner is her enemy. Let him take the scroll of death—and go ahead to use it!"

The slim white arm of Ariadne's extended the scroll's long cylinder. Theseus came forward silent, and took it, contriving not to betray its

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unexpected weight. He searched her white, lovely features for some hint of understanding. Her face remained a serene, proud mask.

"Go, pirate," she said. "The Labyrinth is open."

Already shivering to the abrupt penetrating chill that had invaded the black hall, Theseus slowly turned. He saw that Talos had stooped to grasp a huge bronze ring-bolt fastened to one of the great square basalt blocks that paved the floor, was lifting.

Gleaming bronze limbs and torso splendid with bunched swelling muscles, Talos heaved mightily. The huge stone came slowly up, before the dais. A dark, acrid fetor rose up from the black space beneath, and a stillness of awful dread fell upon the hall.

Theseus saw that the priests were blanched and shuddering. The visage of Daedalus was a dark, stony mask; Ariadne's face was white, frozen, and Minos had ceased to smile. Theseus himself felt a weak sickness of terror.

Something in that dank stench loosened his knees and poured cold fear dust down his spine. It was a hint of something more than cold and wet and endless dark and ancient rot, a reek of something—monstrous!

The straining body of Talos made muffled ringing sounds, like the thrum of muted strings, and at last the grinding stone came fully upright. The pallid priests silently leveled their lances, and the great, urgent hand of Talos reached out, hot with his effort.

Theseus glanced back at the three on the dais. He managed a mocking grin, and waved the papyrus scroll at them, casually. He turned, and spat deliberately into the dark pit beneath the lifted stone, and walked casually toward it.

Yet he was shivering. He pressed the scroll against his side, to stop

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the shaking of it. He came to the brink of the pit. In the faint reflected light, he saw stone steps, leading down.

He bent, placed his hands on the brink, and dropped upon the stair. Waving the scroll in farewell, under the flaming yellow eyes of Talos, he walked down into that sharp and ancient fetor.

That huge gong sobbed again behind him; the priests were chanting. The stone ground. There was a dull and mighty crash. And all light was cut off, as the many tons of the basalt door fell back into place.

## XVII.

THESEUS STOOD motionless for a time upon those stone steps that he could no longer see. The air about him was a cold, stagnant fluid. It stung his nostrils with that reek of ancient putrescence, troubled him with that foul hint of something—living.

The mighty jar of the falling stone rang for a space in his ears, and then he felt the silence. He knew that the men and the lesser gods of Crete must be moving out of the black-walled hall. But not even the tread of Talos came to him through the portal and the floor.

The silence was solid, frightful.

Even in the utter dark, however, and despite that appalling, paralyzing stillness, he sought a ray of hope. For he had passed the three walls of Crete, and now he stood, still living, in the domain of the Dark One.

The Dark One, he knew—or fear of the Dark One—was the real ruler of Crete. If the hungry toil-drawn thousands obeyed the edicts of Minos, and starved their children to pay tithes and taxes, and offered them to perish in the games, it was through that fear.

Theseus stood unbowed within the entrance to the god's dwelling, and

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he was not empty-handed. He had felt the unexpected weight within the papyrus scroll, when Ariadne gave it to him. Now, when his eager fingers broke the seal and ripped it open, they found a thing they well knew—the polished hilt of the Falling Star!

The steel blade had been taken by the Etruscans who first captured him, by his own design, in the street of Ekoros. He had not expected to feel it in his hand again. He made a hissing stroke through the musty dark, and breathed his thanks to Aradiane.

Gripping the sword, he started down the slippery steps.

"Well, Falling Star," he whispered, "if we are fated to rot and rust here, at least we'll seek the Dark One first—and find out if bright steel will cut the stuff that Cretan gods are made of!"

His groping hands could span the rough-hewn passage, reach the arch above. The slope was sharply down, so that the steps were narrow. He went slowly, counting the steps and testing each carefully before he set his full weight upon it.

After sixty steps there was a small square landing and a turning in the passage; after sixty more, another. Upon the third landing his foot crushed something brittle, and his exploring fingers found two crumbling skeletons.

He thought that the more delicate bones must have been a woman's. The two sets were intermingled, as if their owners had perished in a final long embrace. Oddly, the man's skull and a few others of the larger bones were missing.

Theseus left the remains and went on down, wondering what might be upon the fourth landing. Again he counted fifty-eight steps. But, where the fifty-ninth had been, there was —nothing.

Almost, moving with too great confidence, he had lost his balance. He recovered himself, and climbed one step back. He could feel a faint current of fetid air, rising beyond that invisible brink. Faintly, his ears caught a whisper of moving water, somewhere far below.

He tried to shout, to explore the space before him with the sound of his voice. His first effort brought only a rasping croak. Resolutely he put down the monstrous fear that this half-expected chasm had planted in him, and called out hoarsely:

"Greeting, Dark One!"

FOR A LONG TIME there was no echo at all, as if Theseus' voice had fallen against some muting curtain. At last, however, the reverberations of his shout came rolling back, amplified and distorted, from a thousand ragged distant ledges. He knew that there was a cavern before him, vast and deep.

Reaching out carefully, he explored the walls with his fingers as far as he could reach. Smooth stone extended in every direction. He could discover no possible way of climbing up or aside, and even the questing tip of his sword could reach no possible footing before him or below.

He knew, now, why the unknown man and woman had chosen to die upon the landing. He guessed, too, why part of their bones were gone—and that he had not been the first to follow them.

Their bones, he thought, might be useful to him also.

Climbing back to the landing, he gathered up the woman's skull and an armful of bones. He counted and tested the slime-covered steps again, and came back to the one above the

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last, and dropped the man's thigh bone over the brink.

It struck no ledge to which he could dare to drop. For a long time no sound at all came back from the chasm. Then there was a faint and distant splash, that whispered eerily against the unseen walls.

Patiently, he dropped other bones at different point along the step, and then began tossing them in different directions. All of them fell for a long time, as the first had done, and splashed faintly, until he tossed the skull.

That struck something before him, and almost level with the step. It rolled, with a thin, hollow, bumping sound, and the bumping ceased, and finally there was another tiny splash.

Several other bones struck that uneven surface, and some of them remained there. Not even by extending the point of the sword as far as it would reach, could Theseus touch anything. But, at last, when his ears and the tossed bones had told him all they could, he crouched and swung his arms and leaped flat-footedly.

For an instant he thought that he was falling short, and he had a hideous sick awareness of the deep black abyss beneath. Then he came sprawling down upon an uneven point of rock, and slid, and at last caught himself upon its projections.

Creeping at first upon bruised hands and torn knees, Theseus explored the ledge to which he had leaped. It was a narrow spur of rock, he found, thrusting out toward the bottom of that black stair.

The way through the dwelling of the Dark One was clearly thick-set with peril. The most of those thrust into the Labyrinth, he thought, must perish in this chasm he had passed.

Was the justice of the Dark One merely—death?

LYING there on the jagged damp spur, waiting for breath and strength, Theseus tried to recall all his knowledge of the Dark One. The deity was sometimes represented, he knew, as a gigantic monstrous thing, half bull and half human. For a moment he shuddered with dread of some such fearful entity. But he gripped the Falling Star.

"We have killed bulls," he whispered to the blade, "and men! Why not the Dark One?"

He rose to bare bleeding feet and started climbing the spur, tapping with the point of the sword like a blind man with a cane. Sharp edges cut his feet again, and his naked body shivered and grew numb with cold.

The spur brought him to a sheer ragged wall. There was no ledge that he could follow to either side, and he thought that this path had led to nowhere but death.

But he was alive, and hope would not die in him. Presently his exploring fingers found a slanted fissure, and he began to climb, carrying the Falling Star in his teeth. Progress was slow. His limbs were soon trembling with the strain of lifting his body by inadequate purchases. He felt that he was near the limit of exhaustion, when he came to a roof that jutted out above his head.

There was no passage upward.

He knew that he had no strength to climb back to the spur—nor was there much reason to return. Presently, he thought, his aching fingers and toes would relax and slip. There would be another splash, unheard, from that black water.

He clung to the rock, however, and a breath of stale unsunned air touched his face like a ghostly wing. He clambered aside, and the current became stronger. He reached the lip of a narrow passage, and pulled

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himself through it, and came to a flat place where he could rest.

For a long time he lay there, breathing wearily, rubbing at aching muscles. At last he tried to rise, and drove his head painfully against the tip of a sharp stalactite, and crept on hands and knees to explore this new cavern.

He followed a winding gallery of water-carved limestone, that presently became tall enough so that he could walk again, and tap his way with the sword. There were narrow fissures that he could just squirm through, abrupt drops that he clambered down or skirted, cold pools that he had to swim.

Stone and water had fashioned strange formations. One, that his lacerated hands explored, was shaped queerly like an immense bull's head. A projecting boulder formed the head itself, and two curving stalagmites were like horns. The rock mass beneath held an odd suggestion of a gigantic human body.

That strange natural symbol of the Dark One stood in a wide cavity in a long endless gallery. Theseus dislodged a limestone fragment. The rattle of it rolled ominously against an unseen vault, and came back queerly amplified, so that it sounded like the far-off bellow of a monstrous bull.

The cave was a natural temple. If indeed, Theseus thought, he was destined to meet the Dark One, it should have been here. He was shuddering to an uncontrollable sense of supernormal dread. But nothing tangible challenged him.

At last he found an exit, and went on.

FOR AN endless time, Theseus wandered through unending passages. He squirmed through fissures that tore his skin. He leaped unseen crevasses. For a space he was hungry, and the hunger passed, leaving


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only a light-headed weakness. Once he slept, woke chilled and stiff. Thirst tortured him, and he drank from a bitter pool.

Always he went on.

Then his foot knocked a pebble over a ledge, and the sound rolled above him, swelled into an angry bellow. He felt an ominous familiarity in the contours of the slope beneath his feet. And his groping fingers found that rugged anthropomorphic stone that had the head and horns of a colossal bull.

With a cold sickness in his heart, and a tremor of unquenchable terror, he knew that all his wanderings had brought him around a futile circle, back to this dark temple that was older than the race of men.

Had the Dark One been his guide?

A strong heart and the Falling Star might prevail against wood and brass and even wizardry—but not against the nameless, formless, voiceless shadow of power that haunted this unceasing dark.

So Theseus was hopelessly thinking, when a fearful voice spoke to him. It reverberated against the unseen vault, swelled until it was as mighty as the bellow of some colossal bull, and yet articulated words:

"Welcome, mortal, to my eternal abode! I have waited long for you. For I am hungered from fasting, and I thirst for a man's blood."

Theseus stood lifeless. That supernal bellowing voice held an incredible familiarity. Something moved in the darkness, however, before he could grasp that impossible recognition. It rushed upon him.

In a blind instinctive effort at defense, the nerveless arm of Theseus flung up the Falling Star. It rang against something hard. Something smooth and round and pointed came thrusting past sword and arm, and stabbed into his side.

It was like a monstrous goring horn.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

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# The Moving Finger Writes,

# ---AND HAVING WRIT---

We apologize to Salem and you readers. Mr. Baer is quite right. It has been suggested that one reason the Salem people did not follow European custom was that their near, and unloved neighbors, the Indians, went in for burnings. Hence it was barbarious. Hence, they didn't.

Dear Mr. Campbell:

The title of the magazine, Unknown, fits Marian O'Hearn's "Soldiers of the Black Goat" for the witchcraft outburst of 1691-92 in Salem produced no burnings—only nineteen hangings and one case wherein the victim was pressed to death. Not content with opening the story with a scene at the stake, the author has one character say—Page 68, Column 2, sixth, fifth and fourth lines from the bottom—"Many innocent women have been sent to the fire by Coleridge and his companions." Come, come, Miss O'Hearn, prove up on that point.

And to you, Mr. Campbell, hereafter get Seabury Quinn to do us a really fine witchcraft yarn. He knows his backgrounds and can use them superbly well.—Frank L. Baer.

Ratings for the year. Do you agree?

Dear Mr. Campbell:

I've never been a contributor to your "Bouquets and Brickbats Club." But when Norman Knudson of Ogden, Utah, has the gall to suggest that "Sinister Barrier" runs a close second to three other novels, I believe it is time to end my self-imposed silence and speak up for one of the greatest novels that has ever appeared in this or any other fantasy publication. And before I defend Mr. Russell's story, perhaps a short history of fantastic fiction would be appropriate.

1926

A new type of magazine took its place on the newsstands of New York. Among numerous short stories with a scientific twist there was one "In the Days of the Comet" by Jules Verne. Following in quick succession there appeared stories by Edgar Rice Burroughs, Verne, Merritt, Verrill, and a host of others. Some of their stories, "The Moon Pool," "The Argonaut," "Master of the World," and "Around the Universe" are well remembered by the old-timers. For who among them can ever

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forget those truly amazing stories, "The Sleeper Wakes," "The World of the Giant Ants," "The Master Mind of Mars," and last but not (I hope) least, E. E. Smith's "Skylark" stories.

Before continuing I heave a sigh of regret at not being able to read the old works again. Alas, in a moment of benevolence I bequeathed seven years of careful hoarding to a friend who had recently become a science-fiction-fantasy fan.

1933

About this time, when the above-mentioned magazine was degenerating to a typical run-of-the-mill, blood-and-thunder pulp, a light appeared on the horizon. *Astounding Stories*. And eventually, with trimmed edges. No great amount of praise is necessary to justify its position as the "tops" in science-fiction. And I was mad to the marrow that it was not selected for inclusion in the Time Capsule. But I am digressing.

1939

Yes, sir. This is the year it happened. For the past ten months your readers have been telling you what a grand new magazine you have. Not just another new magazine, but one with a new kind of fiction. What started this justifiable praise? There's only one answer. "Sinister Barrier." From the beginning it set a mark and, believe it or not, there's a mighty tough job ahead for the author who thinks he can depose this novel from its position as No. 1 in Unknown.

So much for history. Since I don't go in for much writing I'm going whole hog this once and conclude with my impressions of the Unknown novels in the order of their appearance.

March: "Sinister Barrier"; no comments. I've already expounded on the merits of this tale. Cover? Beau-ti-ful.

April: "Ultimate Adventure"; another really good yarn by a "Hall of Fame" author. Cover, good.

May: "Returned From Hell"; a distinct letdown from the March and April issues. Unknown can dispense with this type of fiction. Cover, good.

June: "Flame Winds"; a definite rise over the two previous issues, but NOT on a par with the March novel. Cover, awful. If the illustration on page 61 were used it would have been a great improvement.

July: "Slaves of Sleep" goes up the ladder again, but does not quite reach the top. Hubbard's Jan Palmer can be recognized as Stevie Jebson of "Ultimate Adventure" in a different setting. Cover, better than average but—WHAT happened to the trimmed edges?

Aug.: "The Ghoul." Another yarn by Hubbard. Not a bad story, but I think he's slipping. Give someone else a chance. Cover, not bad, not good. Could be improved.

Sept.: "None But Lucifer." Excellent. Gold and De Camp make a nice combination. Let's have more of their collaboration. Cover, fair. Why didn't Scott add a little more detail.

Oct.: "The Elder Gods." The title and the cover are good. Too good. They leave a lot to be desired in the story.

Nov.: "Sons of the Bear-God." The continued adventures of Wan Tengri just won't take hold. The novelty is gone. Cover, very good.

Dec.: "Lest Darkness Fall." De Camp scores another winner. Cover, good.

Jan.: "Soldiers of the Black Goat." Well done. When I realized that Hester Gurney was an ordinary intelligent woman who was born before her time, I applauded her devices in tricking the people into believing in her supernatural powers. Cover, good.

And now, the short stories. Each and every one of them is a little gem. Offhand I can't think of a single one which didn't ring the bell. And some deserve special mention. They are "Closed Doors," "Death Time," "The Summons," "The Joker," "Coppersmith," and the serial "Divide and Rule." E. F. Russell's article, "Over the Border" was fine and, after finishing it, I'll be doggoned if I didn't read "Sinister Barrier" over again.

And so I conclude, but not before I make an appeal for more articles, more illustrations, a quarterly—with a ninety-thousand-word novel—and a continuation of your good policy.

And let's hear from those thousands who, like myself, never get around to writing to the editor of their favorite vice and indulgence, Unknown.—Harry A. Stern, 44 Seaman Ave., New York, N. Y.

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## He got a bonus!

Cheerio Campbell:

Have just finished "Death's Deputy."

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I hope you added "that extra hundred dollars" to Hubbard's check!

Unknown's best novel since "Sinister Barrier," bar none!

File away the story "The Psychomorph" as your second-best short story of your first publishing year; the first-best being "The Monocle"!—Bob Tucker, Box 260, Bloomington, Ill.

---

Clay specifically asked Destruction to withdraw his protection; Destruction did.

Dear Mr. Campbell:

To arms! To arms! I must defend myself. Monsieur J. Dean I have a complaint to register against you. You ask, "Do *Astounding* and Unknown increase the misery and torments of people?" Of course they do! Isn't it quite obvious? Imagine waiting a month to get each issue; about two weeks between issues of the two magazines. And you have the nerve to ask whether *Astounding* and Unknown increase the misery of us common people. It wouldn't be so bad if the stories were bad—but they're good! Gold and De Camp even said it was psychological not physical torture that is endured in hell. And if waiting for these mags to come out isn't torture (psychological anyway) what is? Now do you agree with me?

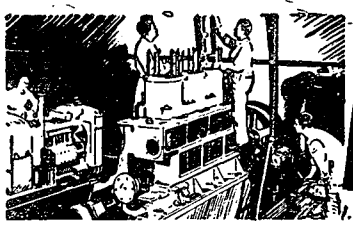
Now for the stories themselves:

"Death's Deputy"—interesting, very well written, illustrations and cover punk. There's one mistake in the story. Destruction, or whatever he calls himself, says toward the end that Laura was protected by her marriage to Clay—that's why she didn't die, or to put it more emphemistically, that's why she didn't meet with any accident. It seems, however, that Clay had no such protection, for he died while still married to her—how come?

Next in importance and reading value came the serial—there's another point against you, M. Dean; we are forced to wait and suffer for two or three months waiting for the end. Are you becoming convinced by now? Well, let's continue my case.

"The Wisdom of an Ass": Do you realize we were forced to wait one whole year—twelve months—to get that story?

The three short stories— Well, the less said about them the better. Isn't *that* sheer mental torture. Mixed in with a bunch of excellent stories we find those pieces of trash. J. Dean, do you believe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me now? And Mr. Campbell, do you confess?

One more thing has to be done however. I'm sick of reading about devils, witches and goblins—all of the bad kind—how about some "Utopia" stories. While I don't mean actual Utopia stories, I do want some more of the "On the Knees of the Gods" type, and several more on the humorous side wouldn't be the slightest bit objectionable.

No comment on the addition to the name—Seymour Liff, 823 East Forty-sixth Street, Brooklyn, N. Y.

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Keep it up? We're planning on growing as we go!

Dear Mr. Campbell:

I'm going to like this. I can imagine no more congenial job than picking the ten best stories Unknown printed in the year 1939. For one thing, it enables me to give due credit to two of my favorite authors: L. Sprague de Camp and L. Ron Hubbard.

Without further introduction, I dash right into the list:

I nominate as the ten best stories in Unknown for the year 1939, the following:

1. "Lest Darkness Fall" . . L. Sprague de Camp
2. "Divide and Rule," . . L. Sprague de Camp
3. "Ultimate Adventure" . . L. Ron Hubbard
4. "The Ghoul" . . . . . L. Ron Hubbard
5. "Sinister Barrier" . . . Eric Frank Russell
6. "Enchanted Week End" . John MacCormac
7. "Trouble with Water" . . . . . H. L. Gold
8. "Flame Winds" . . . . . Norvell W. Page
9. "Slaves of Sleep" . . . . . L. Ron Hubbard
10. "The Gnarly Man" . L. Sprague de Camp

That's three apiece for De Camp and Hubbard.

Incidentally, the first six of those ten are five-star yarns, and I'll eat my hat—without ketchup—if any reader can show me ten consecutive issues of any other magazine in science or fantastic fiction (including *Astounding*) with six fivers. And four of those fivers were lead novels and a fifth was a serial. That's what I call providing entertainment in carload lots.

I dare you keep it up, Mr. Campbell.—Isaac Asimov, 174 Windsor Place, Brooklyn, N. Y.

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